THE OFFICIAL GAMES MAGAZINE OF BEST BUY®

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ISSUE 015 | DECEMBER 2011

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PG. 31

GHOST RECON: FUTURE SOLDIER

COMBAT, INTEL, AND TEAMWORK COME TOGETHER IN FUTURE SOLDIER!

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CoD: MW3 & Battlefield 3
The year's hottest shooters get reviewed! PG. 52

Assassin's Creed Revelations
How does Ezio's final open-world romp hold up? PG. 60

Zelda: Skyward Sword
Help Link raise his blade in victory once more. PG. 64

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MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore
Violence

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XBOX 360

HAS RETURNED
COMBAT EVOLVED
HALO
ANNIVERSARY
Halo: Combat Evolved Anniversary is a spectacular remastering of the very first Halo game's battle between the Master Chief and the alien Covenant. Breathtaking new graphics and 100% faithful gameplay deliver all the adventure of the original, along with a huge list of upgrades and new features.
HEROES NEVER DIE
XBOX.COM/HALO
XBOX LIVE
Microsoft Studios
343 INDUSTRIES

Jump in.

In this ISSUE 15

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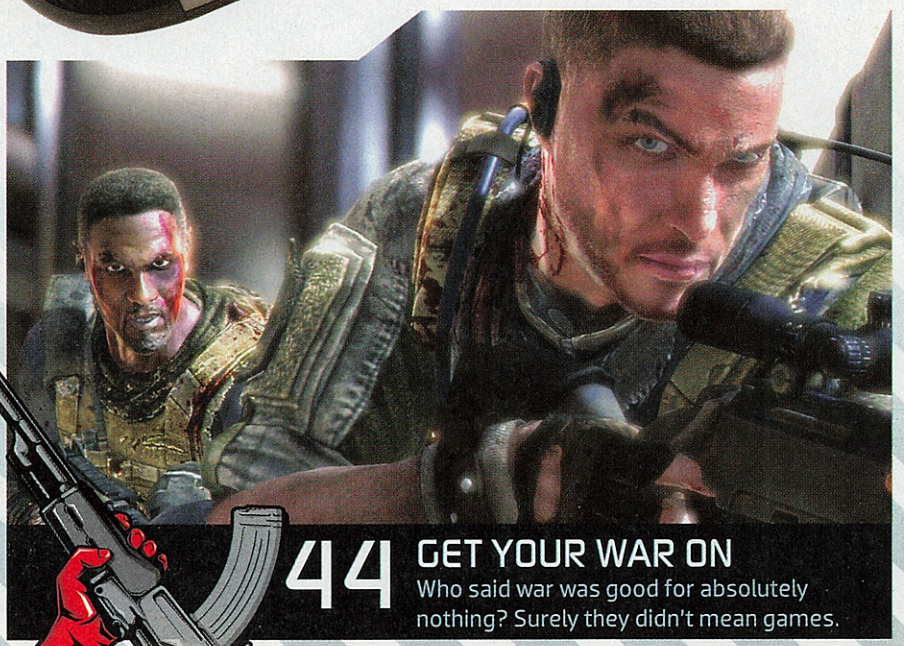

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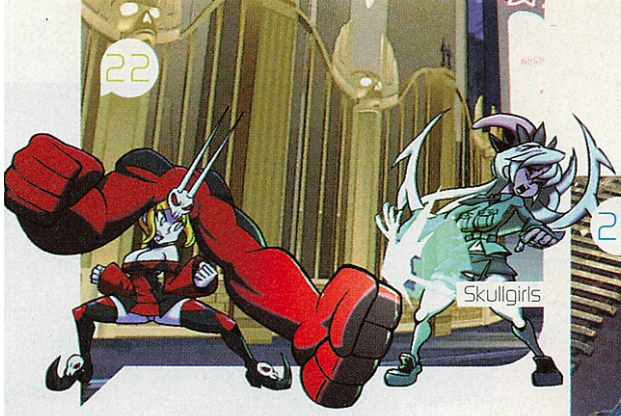

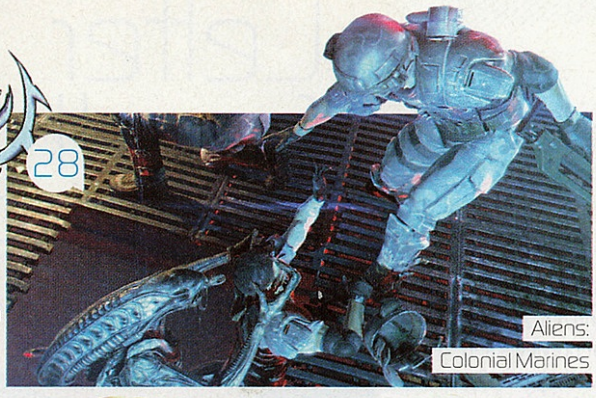

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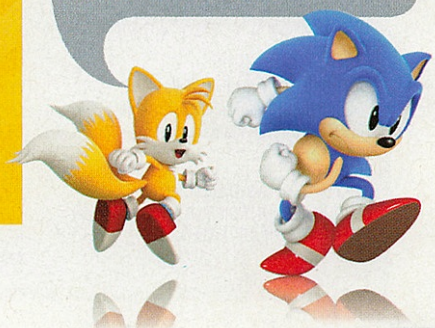
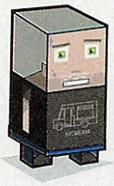


MEET THE STAFF



Andy Eddy Executive Editor
With so many games coming out, Andy is in a tough spot. In charge of previews and reviews, he has to decide which games get reviewed and how much space they get.

Steve Klett Editor-at-Large
Sadly, this is Steve's last issue with us. We're gonna miss his monthly rants about [insert name of random PC game here]. Of course, we're also mad at Nvidia for stealing him.

Lizzie "Sizzle" Cuevas Associate Editor
Lizzie plays guitar. Andy plays guitar. You know what that means? Epic *Rocksmith* battles. Hmm...I wonder who'll have the better chops and rule the office?

Jenny "Nag Vader" Esdaile Art Director
We here at @GAMER have a minifridge full of Nesquik. The thing is, it keeps getting re-stocked with beer. We're beginning to think this is Jenny's doing. She is Australian, after all.

Jillian Lungaro Designer
When she's not designing our magazine, Jillian has been compiling parts for a new gaming computer. We can't wait to see what kind of hideous beast she puts together.

Letter from the EDITOR

WELCOME TO @GAMER

It's hard to believe that it's been 10 years since I fell in love with the original *Ghost Recon*. Originally a PC title that was eventually ported to all of the popular platforms of the time—Mac, Xbox, PS2, and GameCube—*Ghost Recon* is an enduring franchise that's been through a ton of changes. Having been given the opportunity to visit Red Storm Entertainment to see how the latest game in the franchise, *Ghost Recon: Future Soldier*, is coming along, I'm pleased to say that the game is looking great.

The thing about *Ghost Recon* that's so great is that in a gaming world dominated by such shooters as *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3* and *Battlefield 3*—games we all know will be blockbusters—it's nice to see folks still working on thoughtful shooters that rely on more than just the run-of-the-mill "me too(ism)" that's so rampant these days.

With a focus on teamwork, futuristic weapons, and intel gathering, I can't wait for its spring release. In the meantime, head over to page 36 and see what I found out about it.

William O'Neal
Editor-in-Chief

QR CODES AND HOW THEY WORK

Throughout the magazine you'll notice QR codes for some of the games. Simply install a QR reader for your smartphone (or install the Best Buy app for iPhone or Android), aim it at the QR code, and you'll be taken to a trailer for the game you just scanned.

Staff_

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WHAT'S GOING DOWN?

After killing this skeleton, the knight died 473 times on the nearby stairs...

Is *Dark Souls* really as hard as people say it is? Everyone is saying it's the hardest videogame ever!

—Angelo A. via email

ED: In short, yes, but the game can easily turn any gamer into a masochist.

If you just jump into the game hacking and slashing surrounding enemies, chances are you'll die immediately, over and over. But, if you take the time to skillfully execute your attacks, use your shield, and remember to heal—and not in the middle of battle—well, it'll still be challenging, just not as bad as aimlessly mashing the attack button.

We reviewed *Dark Souls* last month in Issue 14. Check out why we gave it a 4.5/5 on page 72 of that issue! You can also read what reader Chase A. has to say about the game in our reader reviews sidebar on the right. Yeah, it's a hard game, but overall it hurts so good.

What's the difference between *Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3* and just regular *Marvel vs. Capcom 3*? Why didn't they just make *Ultimate* DLC? *MvC3* didn't even come out that long ago!

—Alex E. via email

ED: Maybe *Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3* could've been DLC with a simple character expansion, but there's more to it than that, as Capcom revealed at this year's New York Comic Con.

Not only do you get all of the characters from the original game (who have all been rebalanced, and sometimes have new moves), they've also included new ones, such as Phoenix Wright and Nova, along with 10 other new playable characters.

On top of that, the new Spectator Mode lets you watch your friends duke it out online. If you've never seen an exciting, heated *MvC* fight...well, your friends probably aren't very good at fighting games.

Another new mode announced at NYCC is Heroes and Heralds, which will be available as a free post-launch DLC. In this mode, you can choose to be on the good guys' side or the bad guys' side in a fighting-game-meets-card-battle-game mashup. There are about 1.12 million card combinations, and you can earn over 100 ability cards by winning battles. These cards unlock new abilities for your characters that you can take into battles.

Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3 comes out November 15.

Is it about time I finally give in and ditch my original Xbox 360 for a slim one?

—Michael G. via email

ED: The question is, why haven't you gotten a slim Xbox 360 yet?!

Aside from being less bulky, lighter, and most importantly, quieter, it's a better time to get the slim Xbox 360 now more than ever. Now, new 250GB Xbox 360 bundles are being sold, according to Xbox Live's Major Nelson's blog, and in two different flavors.

The first bundle comes with a 250GB Xbox 360, a Kinect device, *Kinect Adventures*, and *Carnival Games: Monkey See Monkey Do*. The second bundle is a 250GB Xbox 360 packaged with *Fable III* and *Halo: Reach*. Both come with a three-month membership to Xbox Live Gold.

So, whether you're into dancing around or exploring fantasy worlds, there'll be a Xbox 360 bundle to fit your gaming needs.

GAMING TRENDS, 140 CHARACTERS AT A TIME

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Get more at @GAMER

TWEETER: WIL O'NEAL TWITTER: @GAMER_WONEAL
Between *Battlefield 3*, *CoD: MW3* and football season, my girlfriend won't be seeing much of me this month.

TWEETER: ANDY EDDY TWITTER: @VIDGAMES
Started playing *Rage* this weekend, and it's fun so far. Worried that *Batman* will bump it out of my system for a while.

TWEETER: LIZZIE CUEVAS TWITTER: @GAMER_LIZZIE
If I had a dime for every time I died in the first hour of *Dark Souls*, I'd have...a dollar.

TWEETER: CHUCK OSBORN TWITTER: @CHUCKONGAMES
Hacking the PlayStation Network must be some new downloadable game I haven't tried yet. Everyone seems to be playing it.

PODCAST atgamerpodcast.com
[Tune in for the latest information about the games industry from the front lines.]

BEST BUY CUSTOMER REVIEWS & RATINGS

WANT TO HAVE YOUR SAY?

What are you playing now? Do you like it? Do you hate it? Let the other @GAMER readers know what you think—send in a short 50- to 100-word review to reviews@atgamermagazine.com, and we'll post some of them here each issue.

Submit your review to:
reviews@atgamermagazine.com

DARK SOULS

One has to wonder at the mentality and gall of a software company that prides itself in your misery and suffering. You'll be dying plenty in this one! It truly is the worthy successor of *Demon Souls*. Namco Bandai knows that they can display this kind of cheek, because even if we feel insulted, or even emasculated, the gameplay is so good that they know we will come back for more punishment.

Score: 4.75/5

—Chase A.

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[Note: Letters may be edited for size and clarity.]

Blips...

News, rumors, and game culture deconstructed

NEWS BITES

BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY

sells 4.6 million units worldwide in just its first week. And why wouldn't it? We gave it a 5/5 in our November issue.

MINECRAFT

for XBLA is being pushed to Spring 2012, though it was originally set to release this winter.

PORTAL 2

has a major update planned for release early next year which will include a level creator for users to create and share their own single-player and co-op test chambers.

GRAND THEFT AUTO V IS COMING

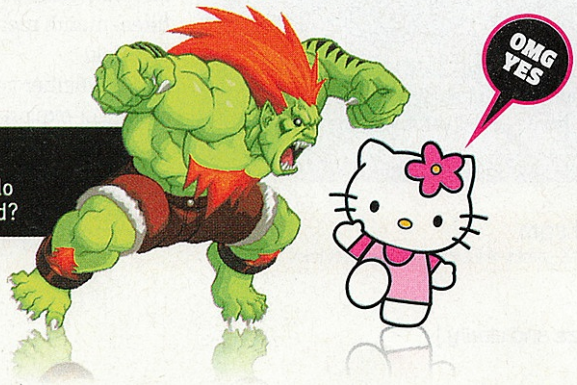
Just like we expected (but also really, really hoped for, and wrote secret diary entries about), Rockstar finally confirmed that *Grand Theft Auto V* is in development. But of course there are still a million gaps to fill and questions to answer after November's reveal of a simple logo and the first trailer.

First, what's with the Roman numeral "V" looking like a banknote? We can only imagine that it means we'll be making it rain dollar bills in this fifth installment of the notorious open-world action franchise. What does that mean for the game's setting? GTA4 already did an outstanding job recreating New York City as its own Liberty City. Although the hint at money has us immediately guessing Las Vegas, there have been rumors of GTA5 being set in the Los Angeles area, which was also partially recreated in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*. Whatever the location, we're excited to see what Rockstar will bring to the table next.

Also in the works...

CUTEST FIGHT YOU EVER FOUGHT

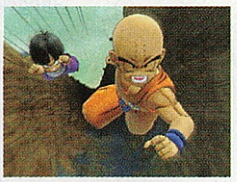
In case it slipped your radar, Capcom is working on "Hello Kitty X Street Fighter" merchandise. Is a game far behind?



THE RAPTR REPORT

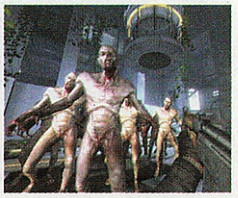
What are the hottest games being played by Xbox 360 and PC gamers? Raptr.com has the answer.

DRAGON BALL Z: ULTIMATE TENKAICHI



1	Battlefield 3
2	Batman: Arkham City
3	Football Manager 12
4	Dungeon Defenders
5	Dragon Ball Z: Ultimate Tenkaichi
6	Glory of Rome
7	Dance Central 2
8	Daytona USA
9	Ravenskye City
10	Pinball FX 2
11	Kinect Sports Season 2
12	Killing Floor
13	Grand Theft Auto IV
14	Haven
15	Payday: The Heist

KILLING FLOOR



INSIDE GOSSIP

DIABLO III ON CONSOLES?

Though someone on Blizzard's *Diablo III* team's title is "lead console designer," the company is biting its tongue on plans for a console release of the highly anticipated PC/Mac action-RPG. Blizz is, however, "really serious about going back to the console," according to Josh Mosquiera at BlizzCon 2011, which took place at the Anaheim Convention Center in October.

BEST BUY BONUS

When you pre-order *Twisted Metal* from Best Buy, you'll also receive a code for early access to a special vehicle. There's still plenty of time left to pre-order the game before its February 14, 2012 release date.

WHERE IN THE WORLD?

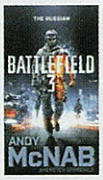
HARMONIX - CAMBRIDGE, MA, USA

INDIE ROCKSTARS

The bright minds at Harmonix behind the hit franchises *Rock Band* and *Dance Central* are made up of talented artists, designers, coders, gamers, musicians, and dancers who are always hard at work to provide groundbreaking interactive experiences.

Nerd Words...

THE RUSSIAN



This military thriller based on DICE and Electronic Arts's *Battlefield 3* was written by SAS hero and bestselling author Andy McNab. He has also written some of the best war books like *Bravo Two Zero* and *Exit Wound*. Released just a week after the game, the story revolves around Dima Mayakovsky, a once-revered soldier of Spetsnaz, an elite special forces unit. The Kremlin wants Mayakovsky to track down a dangerous fugitive in Tehran. Along the way, Mayakovsky runs into conflicts and is left questioning everything he believes in. That happened to us once—not fun.

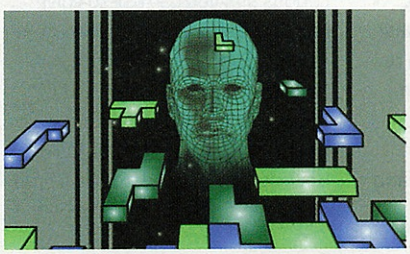
DON'T FORGET THE POPCORN!

AT THE MOVIES

You'll still have to wait for an *Assassin's Creed* movie, but the *Tetris* documentary *Ecstasy of Order* is already completed!

ECSTASY OF ORDER: THE TETRIS MASTERS Alongside *King of Kong* and *Chasing Ghosts* is another videogame documentary, this time focusing on some of the most talented competitive *Tetris* players. The film premiered at the Austin Film Festival this year, and while it doesn't have a distribution deal, there are plans to release it next year on DVD.

ASSASSIN'S CREED Nothing has been confirmed yet, thanks to Ubisoft's Ezio-like stealthiness, but the company claimed it was nearing a deal with Sony Pictures for a new *Assassin's Creed* film. Both parties seem to be leaving a paper trail with Sony registering about 16 *Assassin's Creed* movie domain names online. We may be good to go!



Five Questions with...

CLAIM TO FAME... Most likely to destroy you in a dance battle.

ANNETTE GONZALEZ

Harmonix's newest community manager

1 You're the new community manager at Harmonix. Tell us more!

I serve as a liaison between the *Dance Central* community and the dev team. Part of my time is spent communicating with fans and answering questions in the forums and on our official social accounts. Other parts are spent on the road at community-focused events to play *DC* with fans and get feedback, which is always a blast. In short, I make myself available to the *DC* community all day, every day to make sure their voices are heard. I've been a huge fan of *DC* and Harmonix long before starting my position as community manager, so being involved has been a dream come true.

2 What's your favorite song to dance to in *Dance Central 2*?

The song list in *DC2* is incredible and the choreography has been taken to a whole new level this time around so it's hard to pick a favorite. That said, I definitely lean toward the more challenging songs. Right now it's a toss-up between Justin Bieber's "Somebody to Love" and Missy Elliott's "Get Ur Freak On."

3 What's your guilty pleasure video game?

I spend a LOT of time playing iOS games on commutes and on the road. When Angry Birds first launched, I logged a ridiculous amount of time in that game.

4 Outside of games, what do you like to do?

I consume way too much caffeine so I'm a bit of a night owl. I like to hit the local Boston club scene once in a while and go dancing (I clearly don't dance enough) or check out live shows.

5 If you could have a dance-off with anybody...?

I just had a dance-off with R2-D2 at a recent Kinect event (the droid pretty much just spun around). Total career highlight.

Words: Andrew Hayward

Featured Game:

GEARS TO GO

Finally, a stellar cover-based shooter made just for tablets!

SHADOWGUN

Platforms:
$7.99, Madfinger, madfingergames.com

Not only does *Shadowgun* deliver the first worthwhile, *Gears of War*-like cover-based shooter I've played on a touchscreen, but it also edges out *Infinity Blade* as the best-looking tablet game to date. Fantastic lighting effects and sharp level design really pop from the screen, but the action's no slouch: The behind-the-back combat satisfies with grisly thrills throughout the 10-stage campaign, and the controls (always a sticky subject with tablet shooters) work admirably in the heat of battle. It won't kick your favorite console or PC shooter to the curb, but it's a sharp on-the-go option for iPad and Android—plus, a variety of multiplayer modes are coming soon to round out the package.

What's more terrifying than a cyberlobster?

▼ Pro hoops on a handheld.

NBA 2K12 FOR IPAD

Platforms:
$9.99, 2K Sports, 2ksports.com

Scaled down without losing its appeal, *NBA 2K12* for iPad maintains much of what makes this series so beloved by fans. With one-touch and advanced control options available, you can dive into single games or an entire season with your favorite team, and drop spectacular dunks on your foes while sitting on the bus. Kudos to 2K Sports for also including the Jordan Challenge, which lets you relive 10 of Michael Jordan's most iconic moments.

▼ All of the lights!

GROOVE COASTER

Platforms:
$2.99, Taito, taito.com

Groove Coaster doesn't rely on complex note charts—this rhythm game is all about keeping up with the beat, and the simplified approach lets the game go much wilder with its style and presentation. True to its title, the game presents its notes on a winding rollercoaster of a path, weaving around the screen as you try to tap at the right moments. Dazzling visuals and slick original songs make this an electric iPad essential.

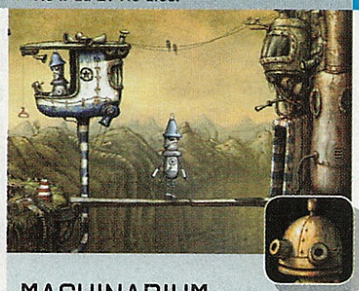
▼ Love Minecraft? Get Android.

MINECRAFT – POCKET EDITION

Platforms:
$6.99, Mojang, mojang.com

The surprise PC sensation of the last year goes portable in this exclusive Android release, which delivers a smaller-scale (but frequently updated and enhanced) iteration of the block-building game. Using dozens of different block types, you can construct vast and unique worlds, whether you're recreating a familiar structure or dreaming up some fresh concoction. Plus, you can invite in local pals to build together—or just hang out and take in the sights.

▼ No iPad 2? No dice.

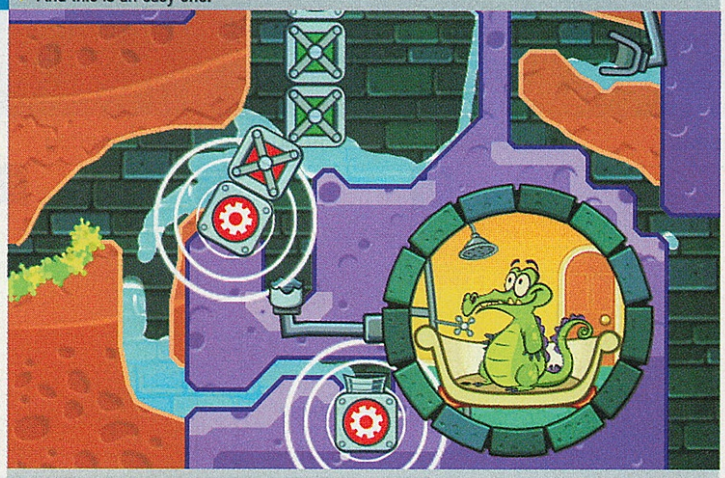


MACHINARIUM

Platforms: (iPad 2)
$4.99, Amanita Design, amanita-design.net

This indie adventure game tasks you with pointing and tapping through a series of stunningly gorgeous hand-drawn backdrops, each filled with items and other curious bits you can use to solve puzzling scenarios. *Machinarium* is a head-scratcher of epic proportions, but the charming quest of a lone robot in a grim world is well worth the moments of confusion. However, the slick aesthetics come at a price: It only runs on the iPad 2.

And this is an easy one!



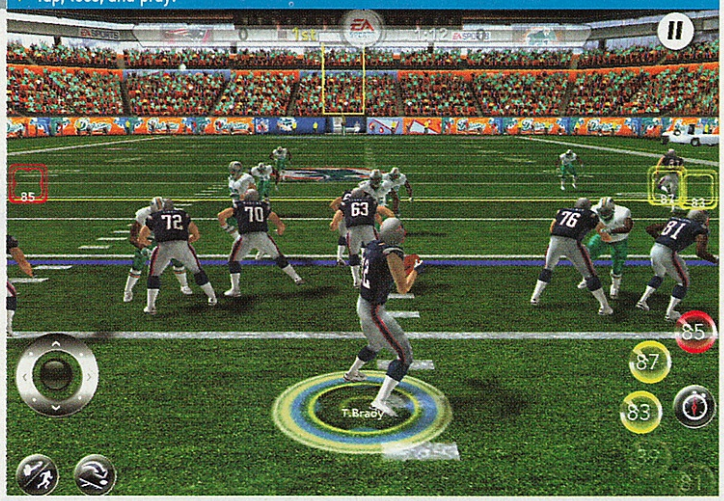
WHERE'S MY WATER?

Platforms:

$0.99, Disney, disney.go.com

Swampy needs to scrub his scales, but nothing's flowing from his showerhead. What's a cartoon alligator to do? He calls on you, apparently, as it's your task to clear away dirt and other obstacles to guide the water to the proper pipes. *Where's My Water?* lets you easily scrub away debris using your finger, but hazards—like fungi, acid, and bombs—lie in your path. Lightly cerebral and always engaging, *Where's My Water?* is quite attractive to boot.

Tap, toss, and pray.



MADDEN NFL 12

Platforms:

$6.99/$9.99 (Android/iPad), EA Sports, easports.com

After a couple updates, *Madden NFL 12* is a much meatier offering on iPad, thanks to the addition of local multiplayer, a swipe-to-pass Touchdown Challenge mode, and the Vintage Voltage offering, which takes after the electric football tables of yore. And those arrive in addition to the core solo game, which delivers a pretty solid pro football simulation on the go. The Android version isn't quite as fully featured just yet—but it's cheaper.

Big hits in a portable package

No TV Needed!

CONSOLE-TO-TABLET GAMES

Thanks to the large displays and powerful insides of the iPad and Android tablets, powerhouse franchises no longer need a television and a fancy console to shine. Here are 10 tablet versions of some very well-known home games.

01 DEAD SPACE FOR IPAD ($9.99, ea.com)
EA's action-horror franchise comes to life on iPad with an original adventure packing the same kinds of scares and thrills seen in the violent console entries.

02 KATAMARI AMORE (free, namcobandaigames.com)
Rolling up hundreds of items into a giant ball is similarly satisfying on the go, plus this version has a *Pac-Man* stage. It costs $3.99 to access all the levels, though.

03 CALL OF DUTY: ZOMBIES HD ($4.99, activision.com)
The undead Nazi-slaying mode from *Call of Duty: World at War* and *Black Ops* is revived on iPad with online co-op action and loads of angry zombies.

04 SHIFT 2: UNLEASHED FOR IPAD ($4.99, ea.com)
This simulation-leaning *Need for Speed* entry lets you race around a variety of locales, plus you can play it on your TV with Apple's Digital AV Adapter.

05 GEOMETRY WARS: TOUCH ($0.99, activision.com)
Analog sticks aren't necessary in this arcade-like shooter, which lets you zip around and blast colorful foes in seven unique modes using only the touch screen.

06 DOOM CLASSIC ($4.99, idsoftware.com)
Influential shooter *Doom* has been on nearly every platform released since 1993, and now it's on the iPad—and the violent adventure still holds up on the tablet.

07 YOU DON'T KNOW JACK HD ($4.99, jellyvisiongames.com)
The hilarious trivia franchise returned earlier this year, and while the iPad version is for just one player, the wildly hilarious questions and quips make it essential.

08 MIRROR'S EDGE FOR IPAD ($9.99, ea.com)
What started as a dizzying first-person running game is now a side-scrolling quest on iPad, but it's similarly thrilling, even while utilizing just swipes of your finger.

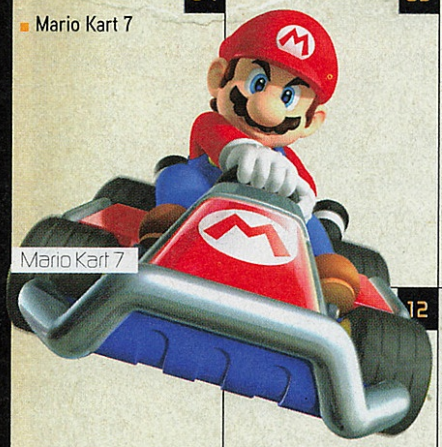
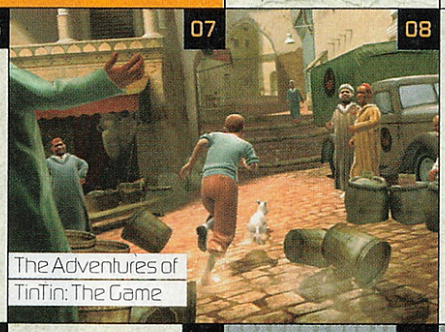
09 PES 2012 – PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER (free, konami.com)
Konami's latest soccer sim arrives as a freemium app, which lets you access select content for free or pay $5.99 within the app to unlock all modes and features.

10 METAL GEAR SOLID TOUCH ($0.99, konami.com)
Unlike the narrative-heavy home entries, *Touch* is an arcade-style shooting gallery game where you'll blast away familiar enemies from the popular stealth series.

CALENDAR

DECEMBER 2011

■ Game Release Date ■ The @GAMER Podcast ↘ This day in videogame history...

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
ARE YOU A PRE-ORDER PRO? If you want to keep tabs on all of the pre-order specials that Best Buy and game publishers have put together, just scan this QR code with your smartphone. One webpage will tell all!		**JANUARY 2012 HIGHLIGHTS:** **Silent Hill Collection: 01/24** **Final Fantasy XIII-2 : 01/31**	01	02 ■ THE @GAMER PODCAST, EPISODE 30	03
04 ■ Mario Kart 7  Mario Kart 7	05	06 ■ The Adventures of TinTin: The Game ■ Deadliest Warrior: Ancient Combat	07  The Adventures of TinTin: The Game	08	09	10 ↘ 1993 – id Software releases *Doom*
12	13	14	15	16 ■ THE @GAMER PODCAST, EPISODE 31		17 ↘ 1987 – Capcom releases the first *Mega Man* game
18	19	20 ■ Star Wars: The Old Republic	21 FIRST DAY OF WINTER	22	23	24
25 CHRISTMAS DAY	26	27 ↘ 1987 – The debut of videogame-based game show *Starcade*	28 Star Wars: The Old Republic	29	30	31 NEW YEAR'S EVE

ALL GAME NAMES ARE LISTED ON THEIR RESPECTIVE RELEASE DATES. LISTINGS SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT NOTICE. FOR MORE INFO, GO TO BESTBUY.COM
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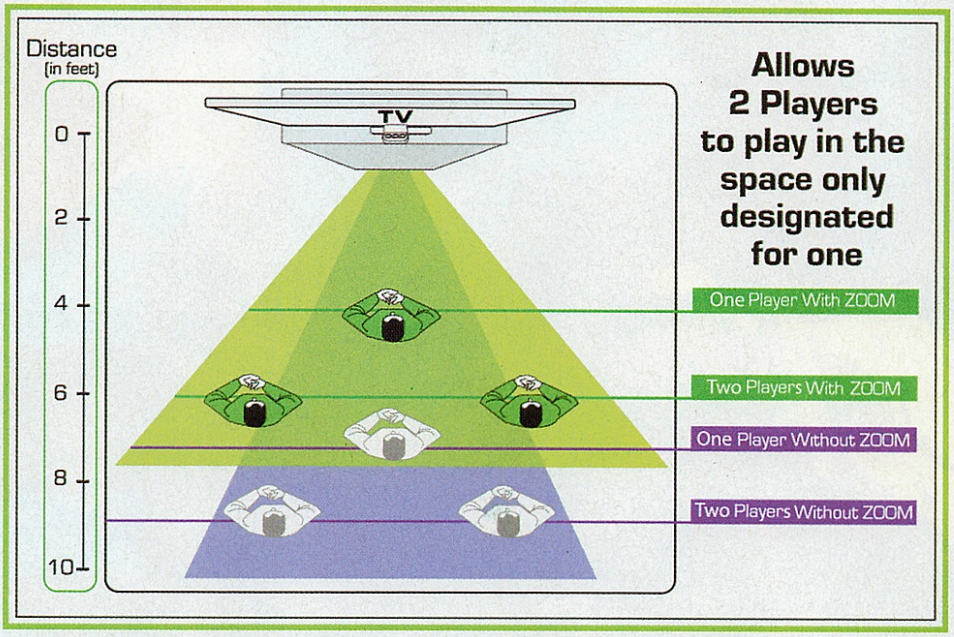

*Kinect Not Included

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STAR TREK

01

IT'S GREAT THAT WE'LL BE ABLE TO PLAY AS KIRK AND SPOCK...

01 ALMOST THERE
Little-known fact: Spock is a big Bill Withers fan. Favorite song? "Lean on Me."

02 OUTER SPACE
You'll be getting to know the starship *Enterprise* from the inside and the outside.

03 DAMAGE CLAIM
Kirk and Spock will explore mysteries, such as what this gnarled wreckage was and who destroyed it.

02

03

Fans of the sci-fi classic finally get to return to the final frontier • Words: Evan Narcisse

Holmes and Watson...Batman and Robin... Bert and Ernie. It's a rare thing when fictional partnerships become so ingrained in pop-culture history, because it means that the pairing hits on something essential about joint ventures and human nature.

One of the strongest such duos comes from Gene Roddenberry's classic TV series *Star Trek*. Yet, as important as the human captain and half-Vulcan first officer are to the past two generations, they've been conspicuously absent from the videogame medium.

Most prior *Trek* games have given you secondary characters to control, and even then you didn't inhabit them so much as you steered them. Thankfully, next year's *Star Trek* game lets players boldly go as the Enterprise's most memorable crew members. But, while it's great that we'll be able to play as Kirk and Spock, the two characters can't be simply interchangeable. Developer Digital Extremes promises that they'll be very dissimilar, and that those differences will be key to the game's enjoyment.

"The foundation of this game is the relationship between Kirk and Spock—a half-Vulcan and a human," says creative director Steve Sinclair, "and how these two very different beings come to understand one another."

As for the action, Sinclair elaborates that "*Star Trek* is a cover shooter at its core. It has the 'regular' environmental cover you'd expect to see, and, in addition to that, there are Federation energy shields that the player can trigger on the spot with their Tricorder. But, all the cover in the world won't stop you from getting hurt. And that's when you'll need to lean on your partner. Literally.

"We have a moment where Kirk gets injured and needs Spock to assist him to the Med Bay. Spock 'buddy carries' Kirk down an enemy-infested hallway toward the Med Bay, while Kirk fends off the enemies by shooting them with his good arm," Sinclair says. "Each character has abilities that complement the other."

Star Trek is aiming to deliver an asymmetrical co-op experience, meaning each Federation officer will engage enemies in different ways. "You'll find that they both have their own unique weapon—Kirk's phaser having the ability to stun an enemy to buy him just enough time to vaporize him with its impactful blasts; Spock's with a unique Stasis mode that confuses his enemy, allowing him to get close enough to perform a mind meld," says Sinclair. "Of course, Spock, being the more logical of the two, is perfect for more stealthy takedowns."

As intriguing as this all seems, there's a lot of pressure. "The *Star Trek* franchise is one of the most popular sci-fi franchises out there, and if you can make a great game that takes place in that universe, that will undoubtedly resonate with the *Trek* fanbase," Sinclair says. "But beyond this, if you can make a truly great drop-in/drop-out asymmetrical co-op experience, an even more massive audience is out there for you." *Trek* fans and gamers will get their chance to become part of that audience when *Star Trek* beams to the surface next summer.

BRIDGING TWO WORLDS \\

Sinclair indicates that there's strength in numbers in the creative process. "We've been fortunate to work closely with *Star Trek* movie screenwriters Alex Kurtzman and Roberto Orci from the very beginning of development, as well as Damon Lindelof and the team from J.J. Abrams's Bad Robot production company. They've been involved with us and game writer Marianne Krawczyk from day one, and got significant insight into the game's development process. We, in return, have been able to access the assets, input, and guidance of some of the most creative minds in film and story."

04

05

04 BOLDLY GO
Finding new planets is a key part of *Star Trek*, so expect to explore breathtaking alien vistas.

05 UP AGAINST IT
You'll be hugging cover a lot, thanks to the overwhelming odds Kirk and Spock will be facing.

"STAR TREK IS A COVER SHOOTER AT ITS CORE."

NEW FRONTIERS \\

▲ RISK AND REWARD
Space is vast and the game will bring the enormity of futuristic interplanetary colonization to life. The faraway civilizations you'll encounter might be friendly...or they might not.

▲ ALL FOR ONE, ONE FOR ALL...
"Hey, aren't we supposed to be doing this together, Spock? Where the heck are you? And don't give me that nonsense about Pon Farr again."

THAT'S LOGICAL... \\

Don't expect egregious violence in this Trek title, Sinclair said. "This is a cooperative adventure game, not just a 'shooter.' Unnecessary or unwarranted force would be out of place. While we assure you that there will be plenty of combat, awesome guns, explosions, and chaos, we will stay true to *Star Trek*'s roots and guiding principles."

RATING PENDING
RP
Visit www.esrb.org or call 1-800-771-3772 for more info.
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

STAR TREK

INFO
Publisher: Paramount
Developer: Digital Extremes
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

RELEASE DATE
2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-player co-op

GENRE
Action-adventure

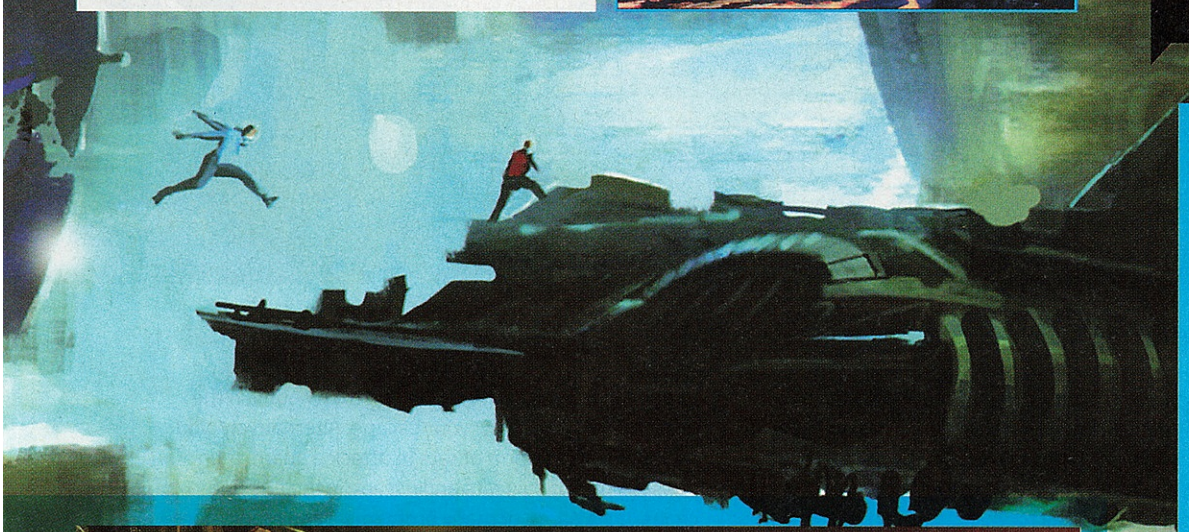
SUITABLE FOR
Fans of nerd god J.J. Abrams's re-imagined *Star Trek* universe; everyone who's ever wondered how much pain Spock could really dish out

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Gears of War 3. Epic's gritty war threequel is also centered on a partnership that's vital to survival.

FRIENDLY FIRING \\

Sinclair says that he and the Digital Extremes team "want this to feel like you are playing as Kirk or Spock with all their inherent characteristics. These characters are great friends, yet are very different in their perspectives and in their responses to situations."



▲ "...all the cover in the world won't stop you from getting hurt."

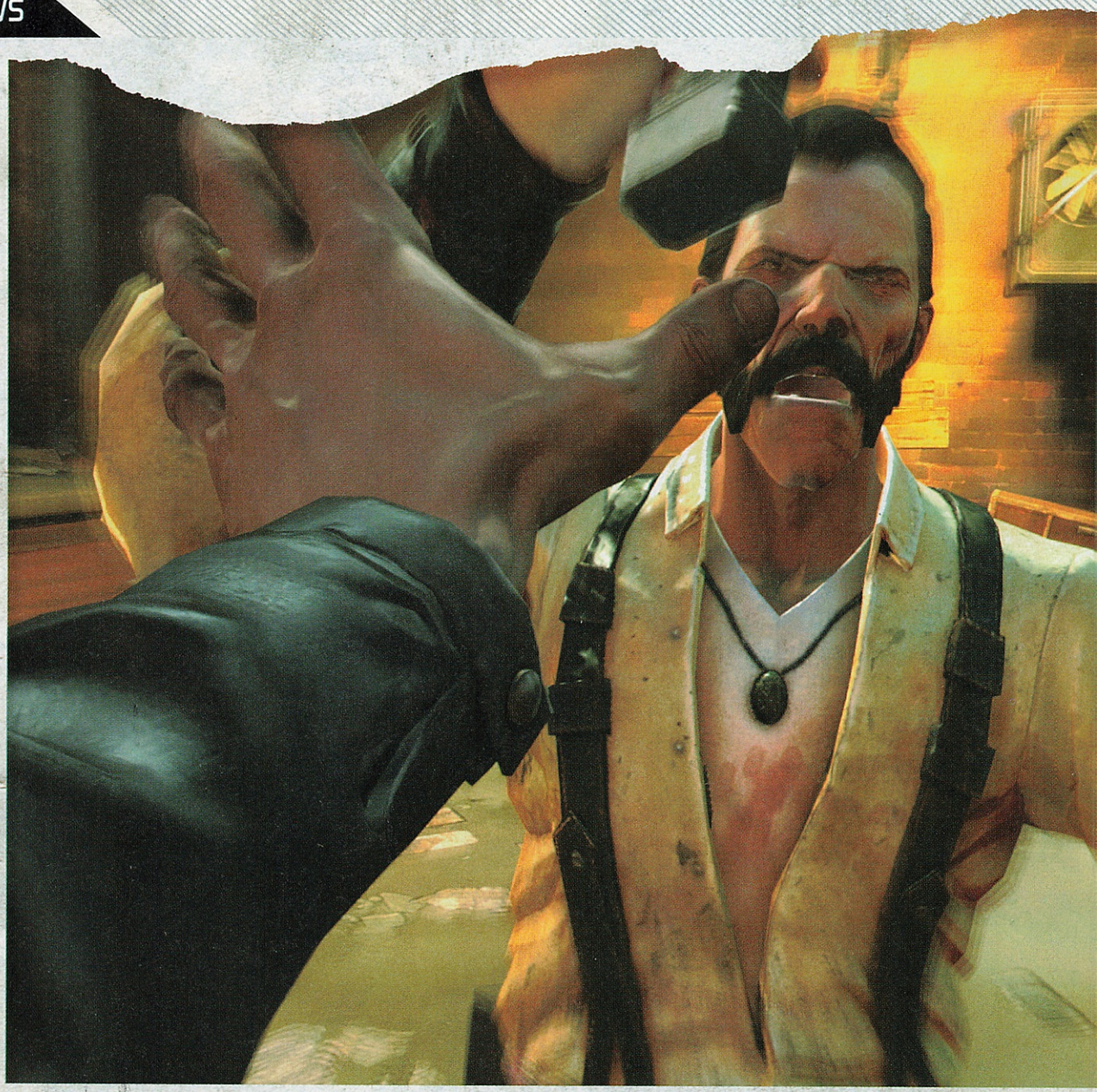
WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Star Trek*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Getting to set phasers to stun... or kill
- Violating—or upholding—the Prime Directive on strange new worlds

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- What, no Tribbles in this game? Tribbles are no trouble at all!
- Partner AI strength during solo play still remains a big question

DISHONORED



Welcome to the dishonor society • Words: Evan Shamoon

Dishonored is about assassination. Like a handful of titles before it, it doesn't require you to kill anyone, per se, but don't expect not to: You're able to set up traps and massacre entire squads of foes, should your mission call for it.

The game is set in an open world, bringing together elements of past, present, and future: Nobles ride around in carriages while rusty war machines roam the streets looking for business. In contrast to today's dismal economic times, the economy is booming due to a newfound source of energy: whale oil.

In addition to some anatomy-reconfiguring combat skills, you're also blessed with a range of supernatural powers. Of particular note is that a single power doesn't simply cause damage or heal you; instead, you can combine them to create new and perhaps more useful effects. For instance, Arcane has shown how it's possible to stop time and knock a bunch of stuff off a table to get some guards' attention, and then hoof it in the other direction to make your escape. Alternatively, you can summon a swarm of rats to attack a guard, then possess one of said rats and escape in the ensuing chaos. It's a game of many problems—and many more solutions.

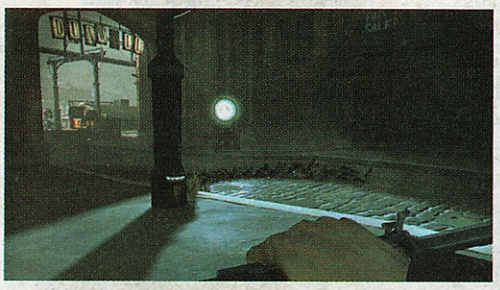
But *Dishonored* is also about morality, with nearly every decision you make coming with its share of consequences. Something called the "chaos" system tracks how much collateral damage you cause, and the world around you changes as a result. You're not punished one way or the other (as in most other titles), but experience the story differently based on your choices.

Much about *Dishonored* remains under wraps, so just know that the duo of Harvey Smith (known for his past work on the *Deus Ex* and *Thief* franchises) and Raf Colantonio (who worked on *Arx Fatalis* and *Dark Messiah of Might and Magic*) is behind it. Probably a good sign.

**MAGIC MOUNTAIN ** *In Dishonored* you take on the role of Corvo, the Empress's legendary bodyguard. At the outset, you're falsely imprisoned for her murder, and must make your way out, using not only superior combat skills, but also a host of supernatural powers and sweet gadgets. Oh, and that melon on top of your neck.

▲ Locations include the Desolate Isles, the mighty Pandyssian Continent, and the city of Dunwall.

▲ You'll wield myriad weapons, including swords, daggers, and guns (including muskets and powerful but slow pistols).



▲ Packs of rats roam the cities, capable of leaping onto men and tearing them apart before they hit the ground.

▲ The red carpet has never looked so unfriendly—to say nothing of the people who are strolling over it.

FIGHT OR FLIGHT \\

Creativity is a key part of *Dishonored*—even in its combat. Many games let you shoot guns and throw grenades; in *Dishonored*, you can throw a grenade and shoot it out of the air. Building on *Dark Messiah*'s combat, the game offers even more complex and subtle interactions between its swords, guns, magic, and stealth. Oh, and its art director, Viktor Antonov, designed *Half-Life 2*'s City 17.

DISHONORED

INFO
Publisher: Bethesda Softworks
Developer: Arkane Studios
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

RELEASE DATE
Q2 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
TBD

GENRE
Action-adventure

SUITABLE FOR
Bodyguards, aspiring magicians, and guilty consciences

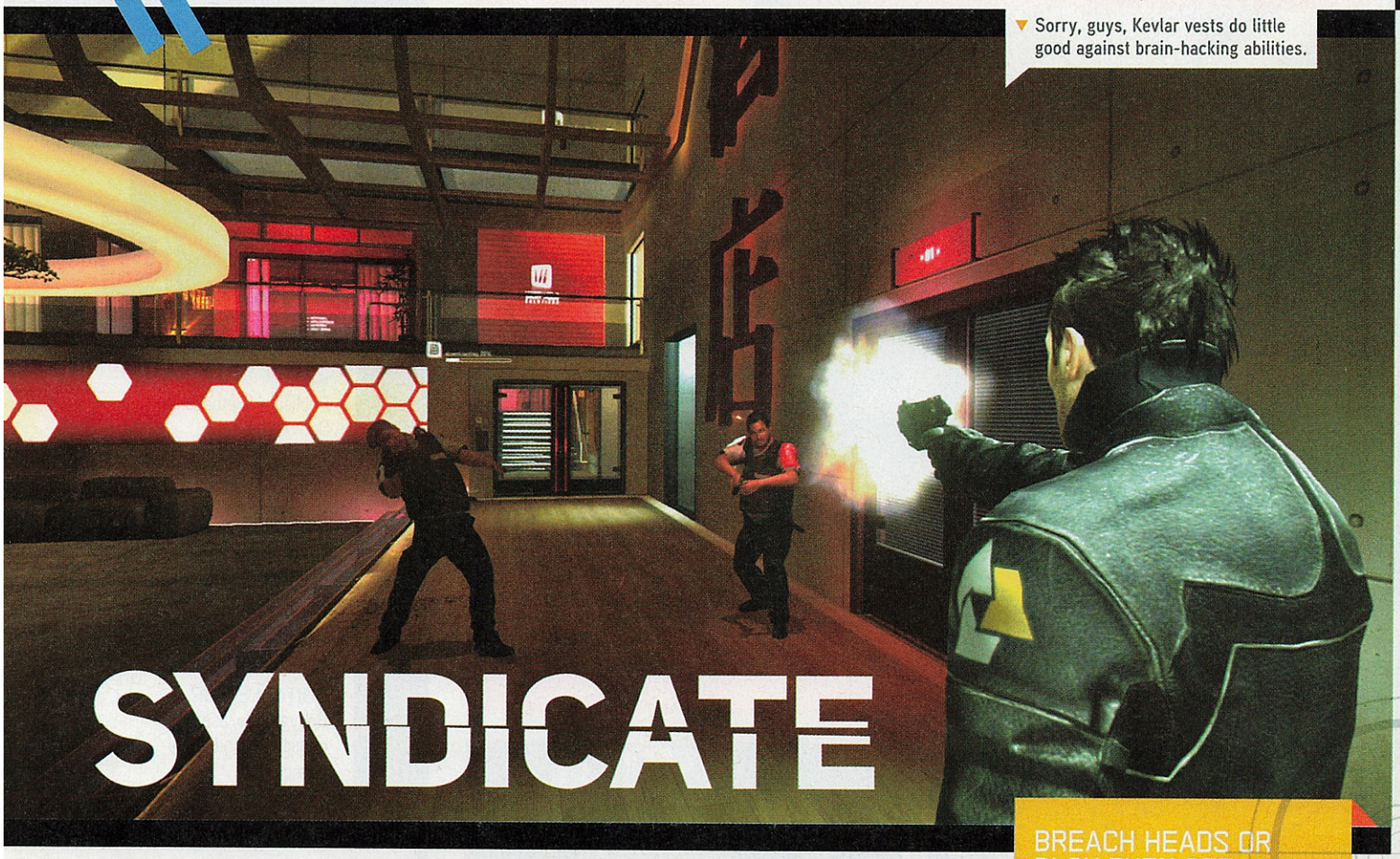
HANDS-ON

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Get a taste of playing an augmented Big Daddy protector in *BioShock 2*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ World is an original mix of elements from different times
- ❤ Morality isn't nearly as black and white as in other games

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Reminds quite a bit of *BioShock Infinite*
- ✖ Flashbacks to a certain Kevin Costner/Whitney Houston movie



▼ Sorry, guys, Kevlar vests do little good against brain-hacking abilities.

SYNDICATE

EA's next shooter is a real head trip • Words: Matt Cabral

With *Battlefield 3* finally mobilized to the FPS frontlines, Electronic Arts is shifting its focus toward *Syndicate*, a unique shooter looking to buck the been-there-blasted-that trend. Based on an early-'90s isometric, real-time tactical game of the same name, this reboot is shedding its cerebral strategizing roots in favor of an experience that will test the trigger finger more than the mind. That said, *Syndicate* is a far cry from the me-too military shooters currently crowding the market.

Unfolding in a beautiful *Blade Runner*-meets-*Deus Ex* future, *Syndicate*'s promising narrative sees rival corporations—with expectedly evil intentions—wielding all of the world's power. As a special agent working for one of these companies, you're tasked with sabotaging the competition and deciphering a twisty, conspiracy-riddled plot. In addition to wielding traditional hand cannons, *Syndicate* equips armchair agents with powerful hacking abilities. I'm not talking about cracking security on encrypted computers, though; while you'll utilize tech skills to solve simple puzzles, enemies' heads are your real hacking target.

You see, in *Syndicate*'s future-fiction world everyone's skull contains a data-packed chip, and breaching these noggin-implanted minicomputers gives a whole new meaning to the phrase "messing with your head." During my demo, I was able to use this sinister skill—with a press of the left bumper—to unleash Suicide and Persuasion attacks on clueless targets. The former works as advertised, forcing foes to turn their guns and grenades on themselves, while the latter sees them unloading clips into their squadmates. Less lethal but equally effective is a hack that makes adversaries' guns backfire, temporarily stunning them, so you can charge in for an up-close kill.

Not unlike *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*'s augmentations, these abilities customize characters to particular play styles. Additionally, new powers can be acquired by stealing them from others; one of my demo's more stomach-churning moments saw the protagonist perform a "chip-rip" by shoving a sharp implement into a dude's ear before extracting his data. (I've been having trouble using Q-tips since then.)

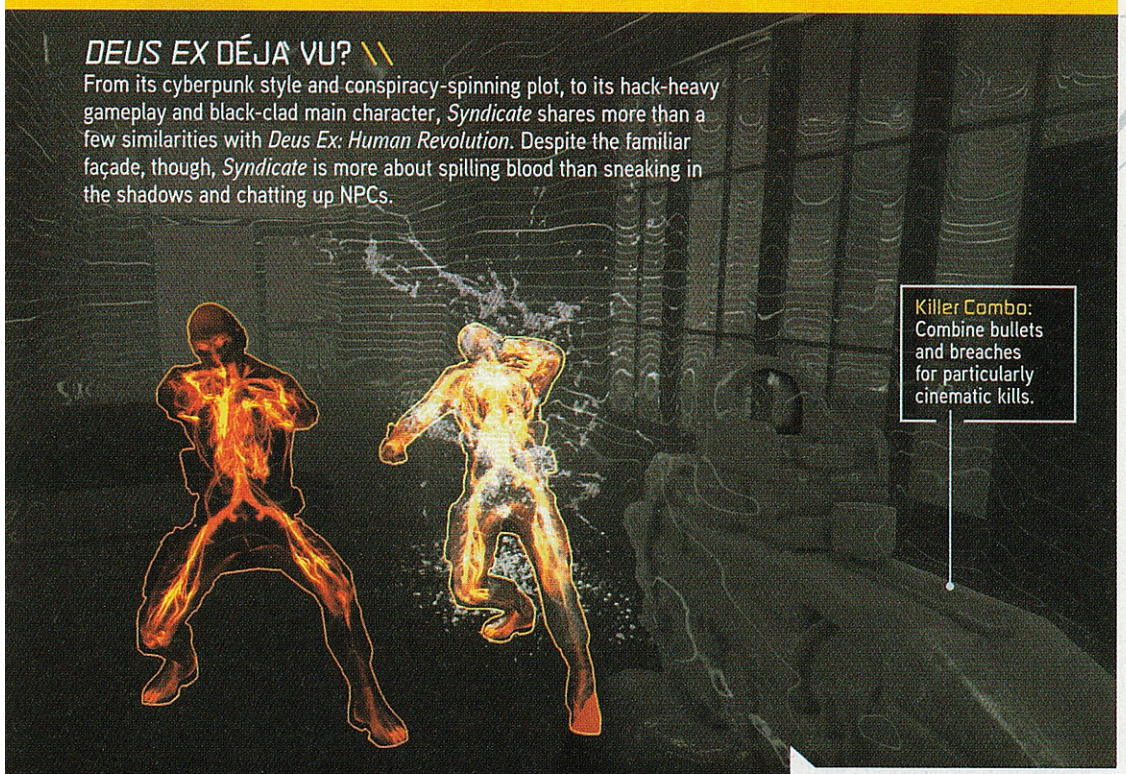
In *Syndicate*, breaching abilities are as deadly as hollow-points, but their use is balanced by cooldown meters and an overriding power source that's replenished as you kill. While watching thugs swallow their own gun barrels at your command is a fun, if morbid, use of these skills, other items—shields, doors, mobile cover spots—can also be manipulated by your mind. You can look forward to literally getting inside of your enemies' heads when *Syndicate* begins waging all-out corporate warfare early next year.

BREACH HEADS OR BLOW THEM OFF \\

It's not all brain breaching and head hacking in *Syndicate*'s sci-fi world. As agent Miles Kilo, you will also fill body bags from behind a varied arsenal of hot lead-spitting toys. On top of traditional pea shooters—all of which have slick secondary fire modes—you'll have access to more creative killers. One such inspired widowmaker tags targets, then sends a chest-ventilating payload their way, even if that means arcing around cover or over obstacles. Shotgunning dudes in the face is so 2011!

DEUS EX DÉJÀ VU? \\

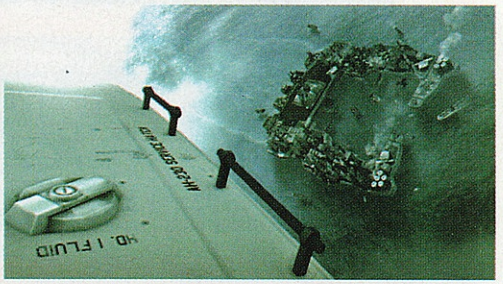
From its cyberpunk style and conspiracy-spinning plot, to its hack-heavy gameplay and black-clad main character, *Syndicate* shares more than a few similarities with *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*. Despite the familiar façade, though, *Syndicate* is more about spilling blood than sneaking in the shadows and chatting up NPCs.



▲ Fire up your alt-vision mode for a peek at your enemies' insides.

NOT ALL ENEMIES ARE CREATED EQUAL

▲ Early adversaries serve as bullet-sponge dummies for you to test your skills on, but later foes are armed—and armored—to the teeth.



▲ Make sure your hack meters and weapon clips are fully loaded before entering a battle with *Syndicate*'s more inventive baddies.

▼ Hacking drones' shields before shooting them makes turning them into scrap metal a whole lot easier.

GAME DETAILS

HANDS-ON

SYNDICATE

INFO
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Starbreeze
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

RELEASE DATE
Early 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
TBD

GENRE
First-person shooter

SUITABLE FOR
Shooter-ists who enjoy a side of corporate espionage with their bullet-spraying main course

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Play *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* as a no-stealth shooter for a taste of *Syndicate*'s story-driven action.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Syndicate*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Conspiracy-riddled story
- ❤ Addictive hacking gameplay
- ❤ A fresh take on a classic franchise

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Will fans of the strategy-focused original balk at this action-heavy reboot?

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS

HANDS-ON

SHANK 2

INFO
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Klei Entertainment
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

RELEASE DATE
Early 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-player local and online co-op

GENRE
Beat-em-up

SUITABLE FOR
Fans of blood-soaked, side-scrolling 2D brawlers

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!
The best way to prepare for this sharp sequel is to take a stab—get it?—at the original.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Shank 2*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Eye-popping, graphic novel-inspired visuals
- Lightning-quick combat
- Bullets, blades, and blood galore

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Will it fix the late-game repetition and frustration that occasionally plagued the original?

SHANK 2

The sequel worth sinking your blade into • Words: Matt Cabral

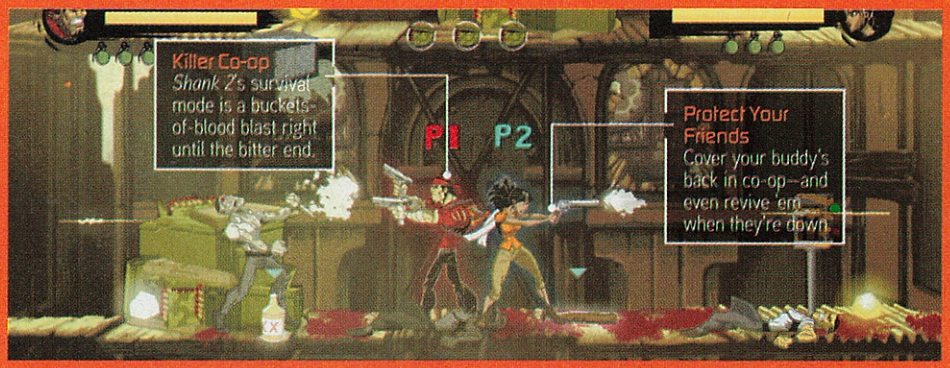
Featuring thumb-blistering gameplay, over-the-top violence, a graphic novel-like presentation, and Tarantino-inspired subject matter, 2010's *Shank* put a fresh spin on the classic side-scrolling beat-em-up. Its upcoming sequel, while retaining and polishing these defining traits, is also driving its shiv into some fresh platelet-splashing features.

Shank 2's story sees the titular blade-brandisher returning to his village to find it under attack. This, of course, leads to him gutting goons aplenty with an extensive arsenal of ranged and melee weapons; knives, chainsaws, Uzis, shotguns, and machetes are just a few of his death-dealers. As with the original, *Shank* 2 encourages you to deliver exaggerated, on-the-fly attacks by quickly switching between weapons with ease; juggling a baddie with a barrage of bullets before finishing him off with sharp steel is not uncommon.

Not content to rest on the standards set by its predecessor, *Shank* 2's tweaking its enemy-eviscerating recipe with added combat depth. Environmental attacks, such as blasting exploding barrels, can clear the screen of multiple adversaries or slow down the swarms so you can catch your breath. Additionally, a new counter move injects nuance while also introducing some of the game's best—and bloodiest—kill animations; activated by pressing the right trigger when an exclamation point appears over an enemy, these up-close body bag-fillers could see Shank ventilating a scumbag's head with their own hand cannon, or maybe introducing their squishy innards to the business end of a blade.

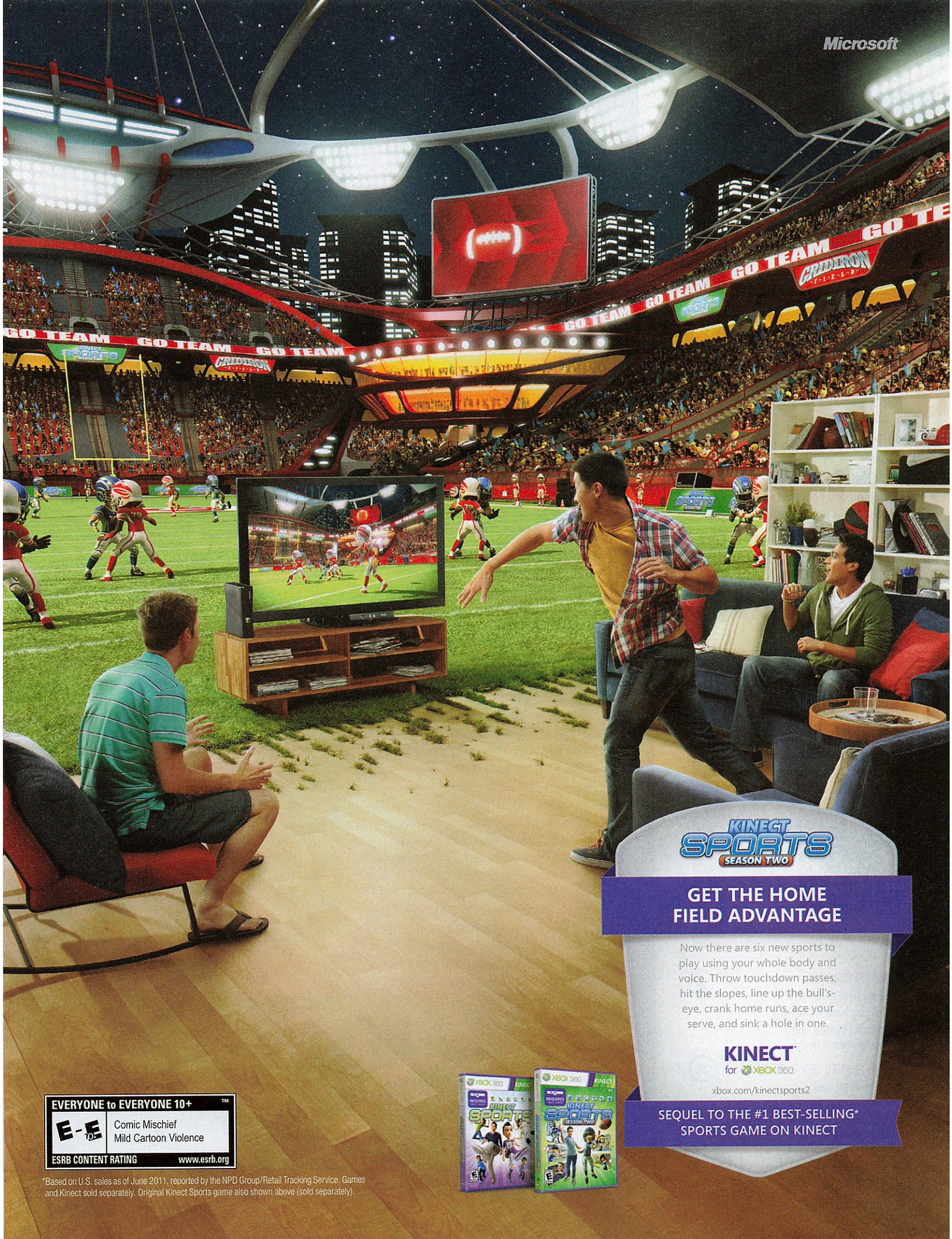
Complementing the improved gameplay is a shot of adrenaline to the series' stylized visuals. *Shank* 2 still looks like it could've jumped right off a paneled comic-book page, but slick effects—such as the flicker of blazing fires—up the immersive ante. I look forward to painting the town in entrails when *Shank* 2 carves its way to consoles and PC next year.

BUDDY SYSTEM \\



SLAY TO SURVIVE

Taking a cue from popular shooters' survival challenges, *Shank* 2 introduces its own take on the live-as-long-as-you-can mode. In addition to pitting two players against increasingly difficult waves of baddies, it tasks them with taking out bullet-sponging bosses and diffusing bombs. Good luck!



*Based on U.S. sales as of June 2011, reported by the NPD Group/Retail Tracking Service. Games and Kinect sold separately. Original Kinect Sports game also shown above (sold separately).

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

RATING PENDING RP

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

GAME DETAILS

HANDS-ON

SKULLGIRLS

INFO
Publisher: Autumn Games/ Konami
Developer: Reverge Labs
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

RELEASE DATE
Early 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-player online or local

GENRE
Fighting

SUITABLE FOR
Anime-niacs who want to see female characters slap each other around

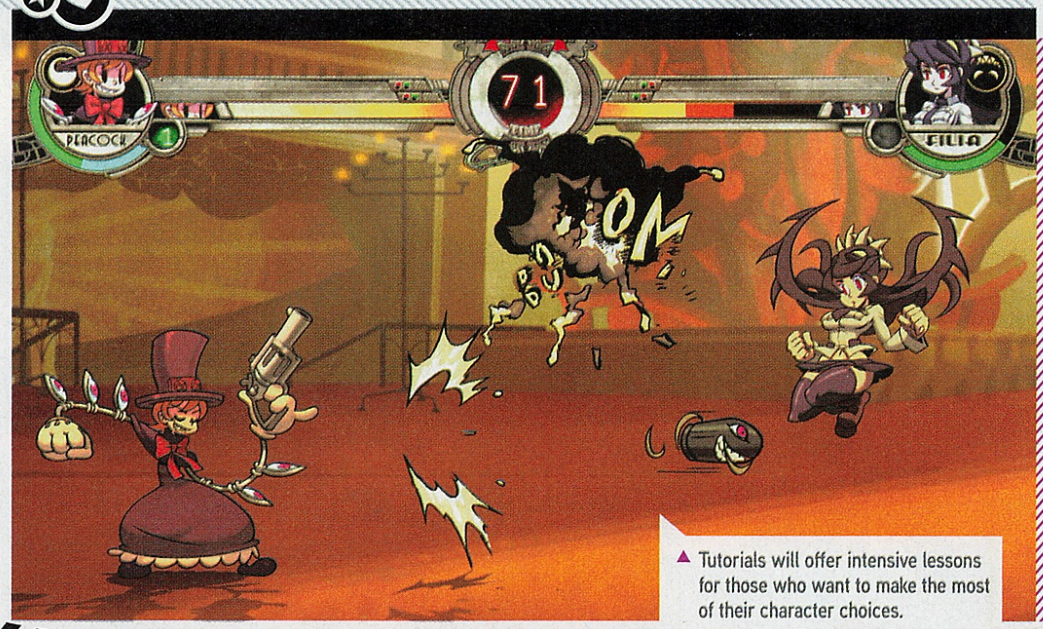
NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!
Tatsunoko vs. Capcom offers goofy jump-kicking fun.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Skullgirls*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Superstylized art style
- Unique character designs
- Amazing lighting and environmental design

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Story might feel convoluted at times
- Nightmares that some of these characters will cause



▲ Tutorials will offer intensive lessons for those who want to make the most of their character choices.

SKULLGIRLS

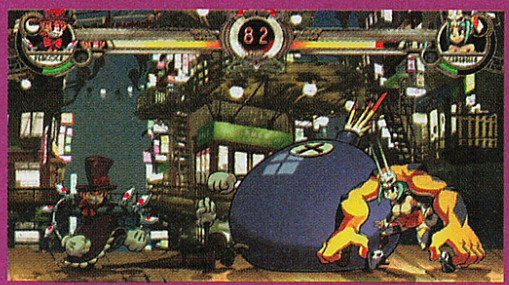
Girl-on-girl action that's not what you think...but still everything you want • Words: Evan Narcisse

All too often, female characters in video-games—fighting games, especially—are just eye candy or sidekicks...but not in *Skullgirls*. All of the characters in this indie-developed brawler are women, and they come in a variety of shapes, sizes, and skills. Every fighting game needs a reason to lay the smack down, and in *Skullgirls*, it's the Skull Heart. This ancient artifact holds the power to grant the wishes of young women, but only if their hearts and souls are pure.

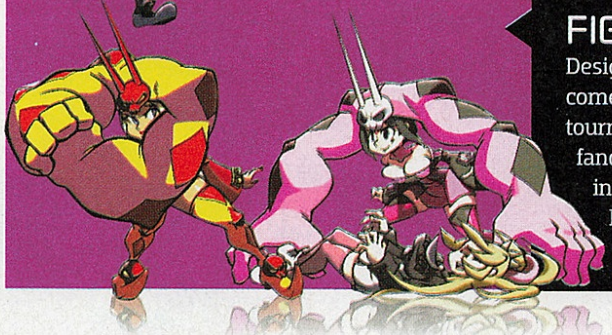
But the characters fighting in *Skullgirls* aren't pure—they're divided between horrific, demonically possessed entities and the vicious enforcers opposing them. You'll play as Filia, a girl with an unholy, sentient shock of hair, or Peacock, a steampunk cyborg set on *Skullgirls* destruction.

One of Reverge Labs's goals is to deliver the most balanced, cheese-free 2D fighter. While such games as the new *Mortal Kombat* and *Marvel vs. Capcom 3* offer fast, gory fun, they're also plagued by characters who can juggle or projectile attack you before you can react. *Skullgirls*'s combat system actively discourages infinite combos, instead encouraging you to learn each fighter's moveset for more nuanced battles.

As a result, *Skullgirls* comes across as retro-Japanese SNES sensibilities mixed in with the aesthetics and execution of modern console fighters. The smooth, energetic animation marries perfectly with *Skullgirls*'s wacky art style, which will regularly cause your jaw to drop. You'll laugh at its taunts and flourishes, then grit your teeth at the speed and discipline of the combat. When *Skullgirls* comes out in a few months, the phrase "fight like a girl" will have a new meaning.



▲ If the classic Fleischer *Popeye* cartoons and *BlazBlue: Calamity Trigger* had a baby, it'd look like *Skullgirls*.



FIGHT CRED

Designer/programmer Mike "Mike Z" Zaimont comes from the ranks of fighting-game tournaments, but he's no stranger to fighter fandom either, having had his work appear in UDON's *Street Fighter* and *Darkstalkers* books, as well as the *Scott Pilgrim* graphic novels that spawned the cult movie.

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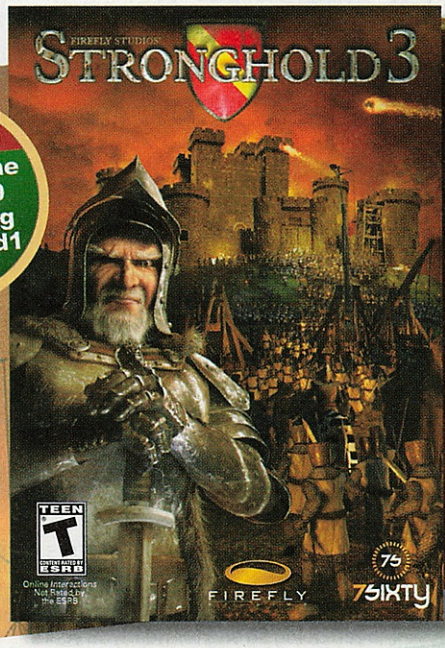

The stunning sequel to the hit RPG **Two Worlds.**

Two Worlds II offers the willing adventurer **a unique and thrilling experience** unrivalled in current RPG landscape.

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▲ Celebrated Elvis-impersonator Maxi has returned for more nunchaku-fueled combat.

SOULCALIBUR V

The soul still burns brightly in Namco's beloved fighting franchise • Words: Will Tuttle

Namco Bandai's *SoulCalibur* series has been going strong for nearly 15 years now, beginning life in the arcades before moving its unique brand of weapon-based head-to-head combat onto nearly every console under the sun. *SoulCalibur V*, the sixth installment, is set to drop in 2012, and features a number of changes that Namco's Project Soul team hopes will breathe some needed fresh air into the series.

While it might seem like Project Soul is taking a page out of Capcom's *Street Fighter* playbook with the addition of a powerful super combo system, the so-called Critical Edge was actually in the franchise's very first game, the arcade brawler *Soul Edge*. This gauge-based system can be used in a variety of ways, allowing you to either take down your foes with powerful single attacks or chip away at their health piecemeal by enabling the Brave Edge. These are essentially powered-up versions of standard attacks, allowing less-skilled players to use the Soul Gauge to their advantage.

The development team is also focusing on the game's story more than in previous entries, announcing that *SoulCalibur V* will take place 17 years after the events of *SoulCalibur IV*. Though you can choose to play as any of the 30-plus characters in the game's roster, the proverbial stars of the show seem to be Patroklos and Pyrrha, the son and daughter of longtime series favorite Sophitia. Sadly, Sophie was apparently murdered, leaving her children to fight to find out the truth behind her demise.

Of course, stories really don't matter in fighting games, as the actual combat is what keeps people playing a game for months (and years) after it's released. *SoulCalibur V*'s action looks a lot like what we've seen in previous entries, so there's a good chance that the series' fans will be clamoring for more when it's released in a few months.

DETAILED LOOK

01 Yoda, Spawn, and Link have all appeared in *SoulCalibur* games; *SC5*'s special character is Ezio Auditore from *Assassin's Creed*.

02 As is the case with every *SoulCalibur* game, *SC5* features dozens of lovingly detailed stages on which to battle.

03 The previous game's Critical Finishes have disappeared, replaced by Critical Edge moves that are more tactical in nature.

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

Hail, hail...the gang's all here

A fighting game is only as good as its roster of fighters, so *SoulCalibur* fans will be happy to know that some fresh faces have joined plenty of old favorites. Mitsurugi, Taki, Voldo, and Nightmare have all returned for more carnage, but I'm more excited about trying out new fighters, such as Z.W.E.I., who can summon a werewolf to fight by his side.

NEW GIRL ON THE BLOCK \\

The *SoulCalibur* series has a history of featuring tough-as-nails femme fatales, and it looks like the finger-blade-wielding Viola will be following Ivy and Sophitia into fans' hearts.

PS3 XBOX 360

GAME DETAILS

SOULCALIBUR V

INFO
Publisher: Namco Bandai Games
Developer: Project Soul
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
Q1 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2 players online or local

GENRE
Fighting

SUITABLE FOR
Street Fighters who need another dimension in their battles

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

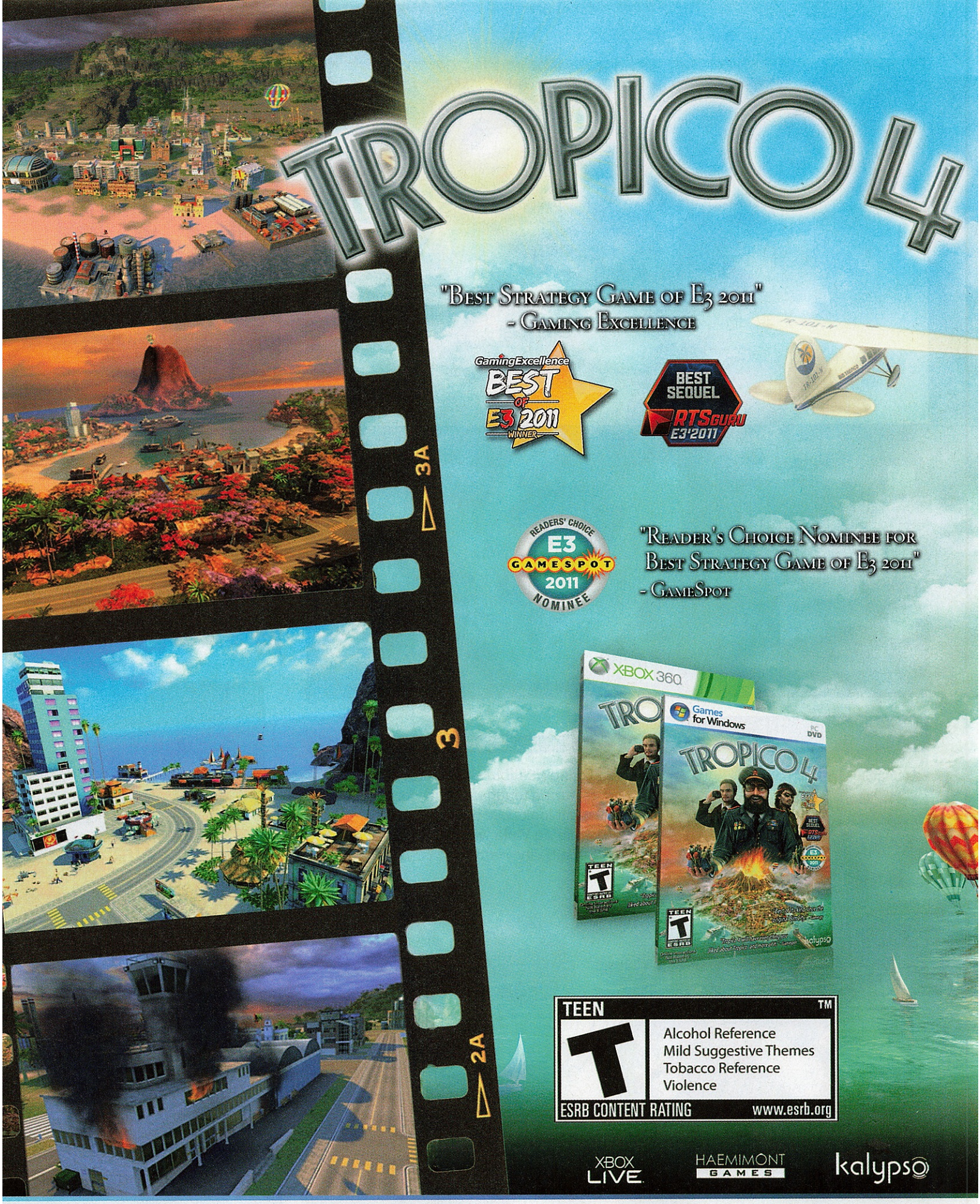
Mortal Kombat is all-out brutality that'll keep you busy until *SC5* comes out.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to view the official trailer for *SoulCalibur V*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Lots of new characters (and Ezio from *Assassin's Creed*!)
- ❤ Stages are just a beautiful as ever
- ❤ Fun for button-mashers

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Jury's still out on the Critical Edge system
- ✖ Fighting games don't really need a story, do they?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Games for Windows

XBOX 360

ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES

"Game over, man" never rang so false • Words: Andrew Hayward

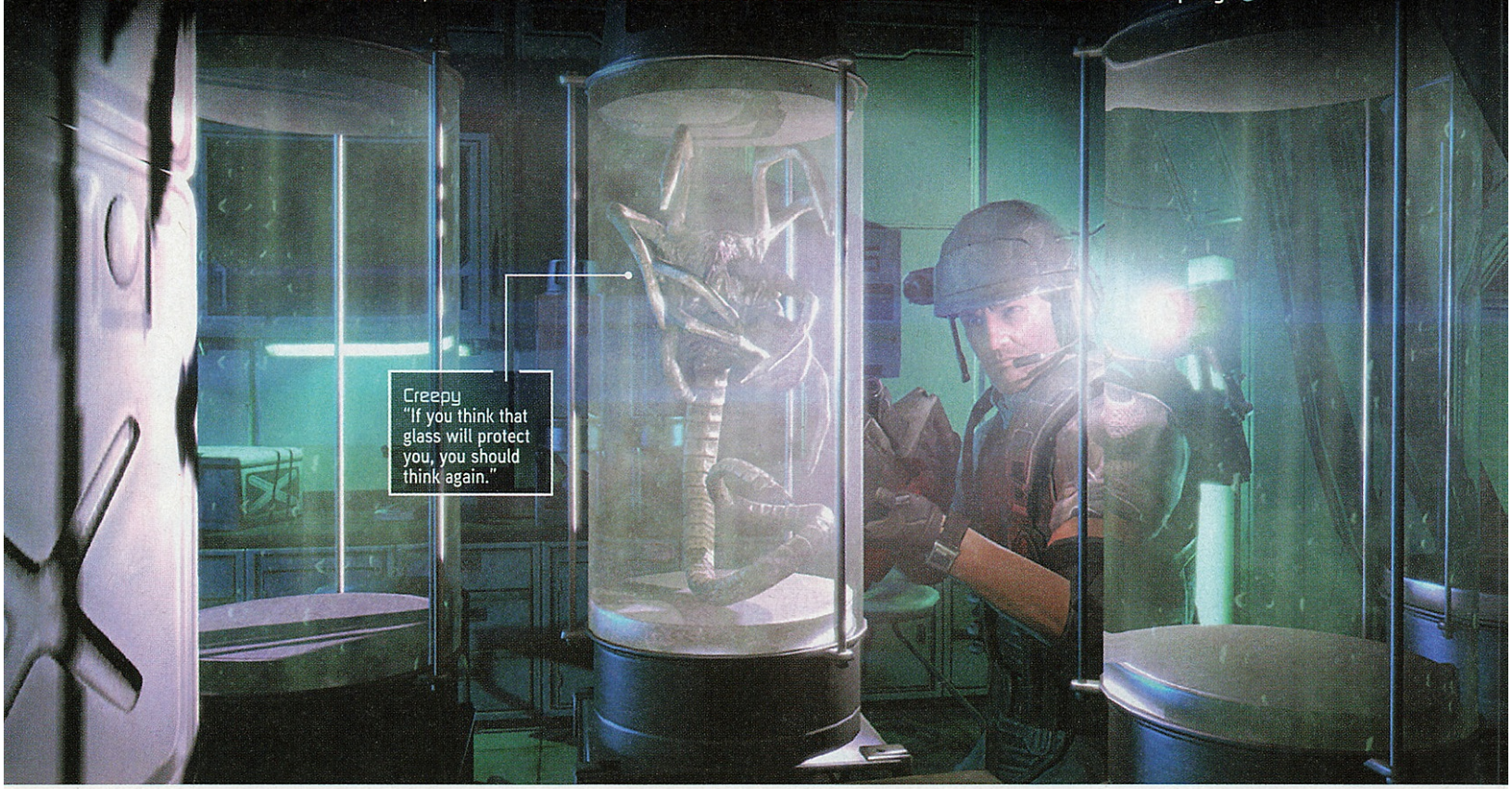
Gearbox Software has been chipping away at *Aliens: Colonial Marines* since 2006, and though it seemed for a while like it might never see the light of day, a recent look at the game offered strong reassurance that this sci-fi shooter may be well worth the wait.

Ignoring the last two (widely ill-regarded) films in the franchise, *Colonial Marines* directly continues the story from 1986's *Aliens*. You'll take control of one of the titular soldiers on a ship called the Sephora that's headed to the planet LV-426, and work within a squad to fight back the menacing alien beasts and continue breathing. During one wildly tense gameplay demo I saw familiar series elements, such as the Power Loader mech suit and a burst-fire sentry turret gun. But what made the strongest impression on me by far were the atmospheric visuals and creepy enemy movements.

Even without touching the controller, I felt a strong sense of dread creeping through the ship's dim hallways, as hazard lights and smoke created a powerful impression of impending doom. And, sure enough, things went awry in a hurry once the aliens appeared, crawling on ceilings and popping out of heating ducts to snatch up allies in a flash. Their fluid and frantic animations give them a distinctly terrifying aura, and it's clear that they're not just stand-ins for the human enemies we're so used to blasting in most first-person shooters.

Plus, the game introduces the new Crusher alien, a hulking beast of a foe whose armor resists standard bullets. If you think the common enemies are scary, just wait till you have a Crusher chasing you on an unfamiliar planet as the door to safety slowly closes ahead. Luckily, an online pal can pop in to lend a helping hand at any time during the campaign.

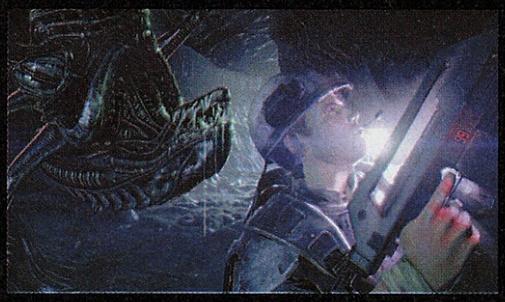
Though *Colonial Marines* is still months away, the immensely polished demo restored my optimism in a franchise that has seen much better days—and I'm looking forward to being properly terrified in the comfort of my own home come next spring.



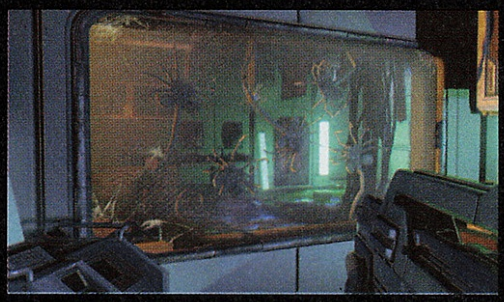
Drop-in multiplayer enables a second player to pop in for some cooperative bug hunting.

ALIENS TOO

Alien 3 wasn't too hot, but Gearbox CEO and president Randy Pitchford says *Colonial Marines* is a true sequel to the second film, 1986's *Aliens*. "It's the sequel we never got," he explains. And Gearbox even got the thumbs-up from Ridley Scott, the acclaimed director of the original *Alien* film (as well as *Blade Runner* and *Gladiator*). "Ridley gave us the blessing," he adds. "This is the real deal."

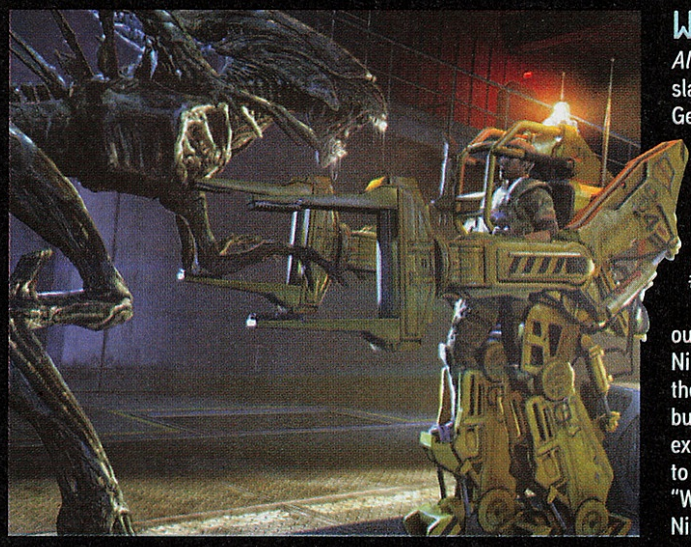


▲ Unlike the human foes of most shooters, aliens can emerge from floor panels and ceilings. Never lose focus.



▲ These little creepers might not intimidate, but just wait till you're face-to-face with a Crusher alien.

A DIFFERENT LOOK INTO THE FUTURE...



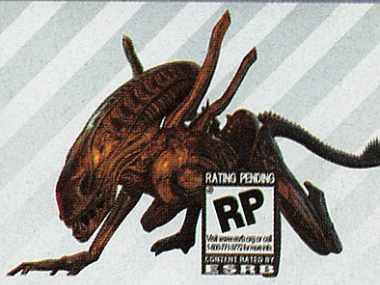
WHAT ABOUT WII U?

Aliens: Colonial Marines is also slated to come out for Wii U, but Gearbox isn't quite ready to make it 100% official. Pitchford says he'll do so once Nintendo details its own launch strategy for its in-the-works console, which was announced at E3 2011 (*@GAMER* #11, page 9).

"We have the game working on our Wii U development hardware. Nintendo still hasn't announced when they're going to launch that platform, but we love that platform and we're excited for *Aliens: Colonial Marines* to come out for the Wii U," he says. "We'll make that official as soon as Nintendo makes their plans official."

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS



ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES

INFO
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Gearbox Software
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

RELEASE DATE
2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
TBD

GENRE
First-person shooter

SUITABLE FOR
Alien diehards and shooter gurus

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Dead Space 2 offers more horror-tinged sci-fi shooter action.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Aliens: Colonial Marines*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Incredibly atmospheric visuals amplify the sense of dread
- Freakishly fast and fluid alien enemies shake up shooter norms

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Still waiting to play the game after five years
- Many of the recent *Alien*-related works

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01 L.A. NOIRE

MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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02 WARHAMMER 40,000: SPACE MARINE

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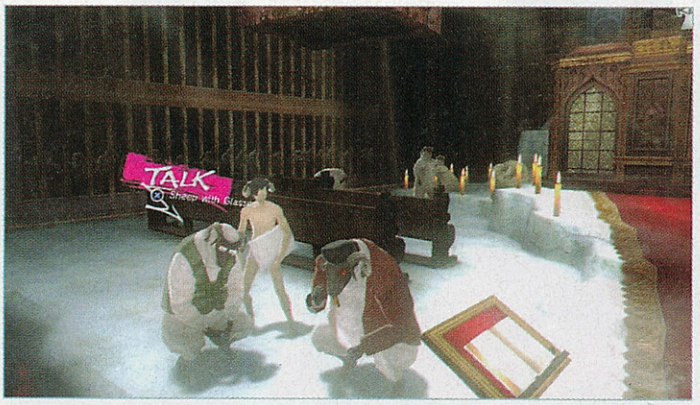
Experience the epic Warhammer 40,000 universe like never before when you step into the role of a Space Marine. Put on the armor as Captain Titus, mankind's last hope for survival in this brutal and violent war-torn future. Unleash the power and fury of lethal weaponry as you fight back and decimate invading alien forces. Combat savage Orks and sinister forces of Chaos in intensely vicious battles. Explore a violent world based on the most detailed science fiction fantasy ever created. Will you be able to save the planet from total destruction?

03 RED FACTION: ARMAGEDDON

MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Red Faction: Armageddon places you in the role of Darius Mason, a man born of Colonist and Marauder blood, who must save mankind from an unspeakable evil that has resurfaced. In the latest installment of the *Red Faction* franchise, you must travel across the storm-blasted Red Planet—and below the surface—as you take up arms against a terrifying new force that threatens the survival of mankind. Will you be able to uphold your family's tradition of fighting for the freedom of Mars to protect the settlements against this mysterious lethal force?



04 CATHERINE

MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Experience a whole new type of game that will leave you pondering Vincent's tribulations long after the credits have rolled. *Catherine* explores themes of free will, the delicate nature of relationships, and the choices people make within them. Produced by Katsura Hashino, the director of *Persona 3* and *Persona 4*, *Catherine* blends an unforgettable narrative with thrilling visual direction and a musical score that highlights the dizzying perils of love. Team up with a friend—or just try to escape from one—in local versus and co-op multiplayer modes.

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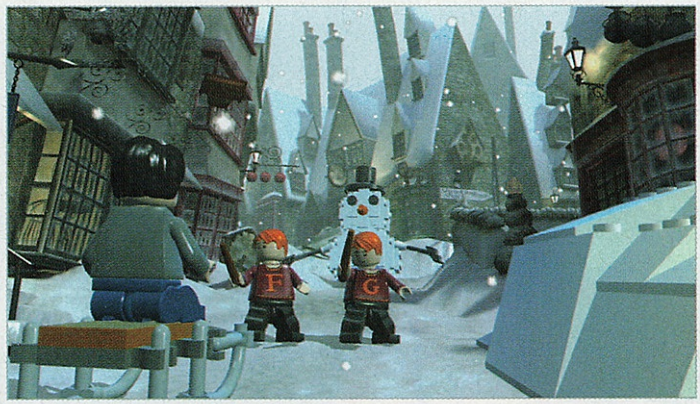

05 LEGO HARRY POTTER: YEARS 1-4 AND YEARS 5-7

Enter the wizarding world of Harry Potter, and experience a twist on the famous story of "the boy who lived". Experience the magic of all seven stories under the spell of LEGO-style gameplay. Build the adventure from Privet Drive to Hogwarts and more as Harry, Hermione, and Ron master their magic, mix potions, soar on broomsticks, and earn house points. Explore iconic locations like Diagon Alley, Little Whinging, Hogsmeade, Grimmauld Place, the Ministry of Magic, Godric's Hollow, and more—complete with the LEGO treatment.

06 SESAME STREET: ONCE UPON A MONSTER

Your favorite Sesame Street monsters—Elmo, Cookie Monster, Oscar, Grover, and more—have come across a long-lost children's book titled *Once Upon a Monster*. As they read through the pages, they soon become part of the action in this living storybook adventure. Only you can help your beloved monsters with the problems they encounter by exploring the book and using the interactive controls of the Kinect. Are you ready to explore the delightful and charming environments and help your favorite Sesame Street monsters?

07 TRITTON AX 180, AX 720, AX PRO, AND GEARS OF WAR 3 HEADSETS

Keep your head fully in the game when you wear one of these stereo gaming headsets complete with voice communication. The balanced speakers provide full stereo audio, and an in-line audio controller lets you adjust voice and game volume separately to ensure you hear your teammates clearly during heated gaming moments. The flexible, removable boom microphone offers excellent voice transmission and is compatible with Xbox Live, PlayStation Network, and PC or Mac computers. Receive $20 off your choice of the Tritton AX 180, AX 720, AX Pro, or *Gears of War 3* headsets.

08 30% OFF ANY ONE PRE-OWNED GAME

Take advantage of Best Buy's great new trade-in program and get a pre-owned game at an even lower price than before. Clip out this coupon to get a whopping 30% off the regular price of any pre-owned game at your local Best Buy. It doesn't matter if it's last month's blockbuster hit or last year's sleeper favorite, it can soon be yours for a fraction of its retail price. It's our special way of thanking you for reading @GAMER and shopping at Best Buy.

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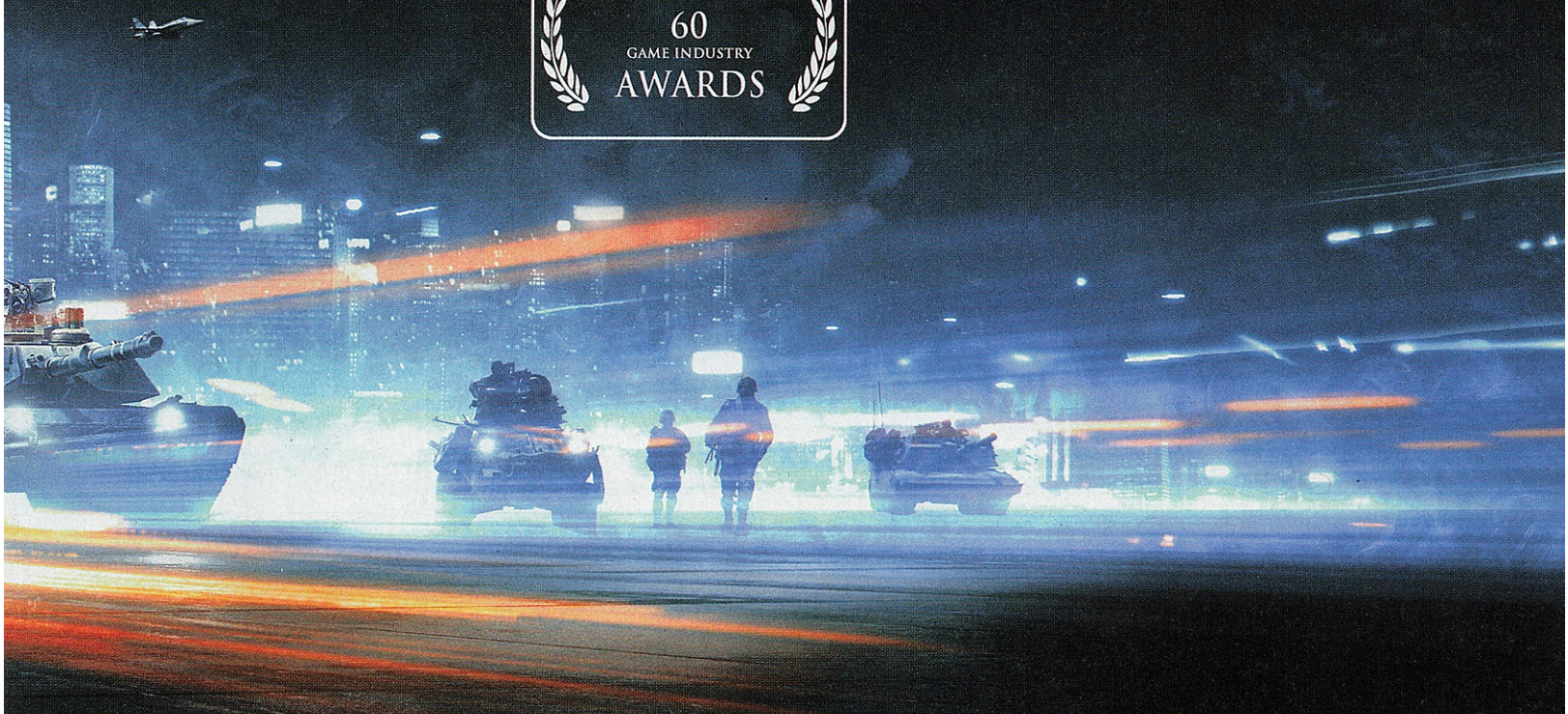

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Intense Violence
Strong Language

PC DVD-ROM SOFTWARE · PS3 · PlayStation Network · XBOX 360 · XBOX LIVE

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TOM CLANCY'S

GHOST RECON: FUTURE SOLDIER

Say "hello" to the future of warfare

• Words: William O'Neal

When *Ghost Recon* first hit the PC back in 2001, I immediately fell in love with it. A marked departure from the running and gunning that I had grown accustomed to in more typical shooters, *Ghost Recon* was a tactical shooter that was relatively easy to get into.

While it wasn't the prettiest or most technically accomplished shooter in the world, *Ghost Recon* was extremely compelling to play. It did a great job of weaving a tale of international political upheaval, courtesy of the venerable Tom Clancy. The realism was such that the events that the game predicted nearly came true a few years ago, when Russia went to war with Georgia.

I also found the game to be incredibly replayable. Leading a team of Ghosts, a fictional special forces unit, I would replay the campaign using teams of varying compositions.

While there have been a whole host of sequels, none have been as highly anticipated as *Ghost Recon: Future Soldier*. Excited for the chance to get a fresh look at the game, I headed to North Carolina to visit the home of Red Storm Entertainment—to wax nostalgic about the olden days of *Ghost Recon* and get an update on what series fans can expect when *Ghost Recon: Future Soldier* ships next spring.

I sat down with longtime Red Storm creative director Tommy Jacob, who gave me my first taste of what was to come. "The first campaign is gonna be an active mission, but it's gonna be focused around training and getting the player to understand the importance of the stealth aspects of the game," Jacob says, "using cover, collecting and sharing intelligence, and the called shot mechanics. That entire first mission through campaign is gonna be used as a training mission."

FOR THOSE OF US WHO LIKED TO GO IT ALONE... NO DICE

HANDS ON_

with *Ghost Recon: Future Soldier*

Future Soldier is all about teamplay, and the entire campaign can be played with up to four human players in online co-op. If you want all of the glory for yourself, you can always go it alone with the other three Ghosts controlled by AI.

One thing that I loved about the original *Ghost Recon* was the ability to cycle through the Ghosts on your team mid-mission to take on different roles as you saw fit. This is not the case with *Future Soldier*, as you'll always play as Ghost Lead. For those of us who liked to tweak the experience by going it alone... no dice.

Of course, spending the entire game with the same brothers in arms—Kozak, Pepper, 30K, and Ghost Lead—you'll develop a relationship with the characters as their personalities come out through the game.

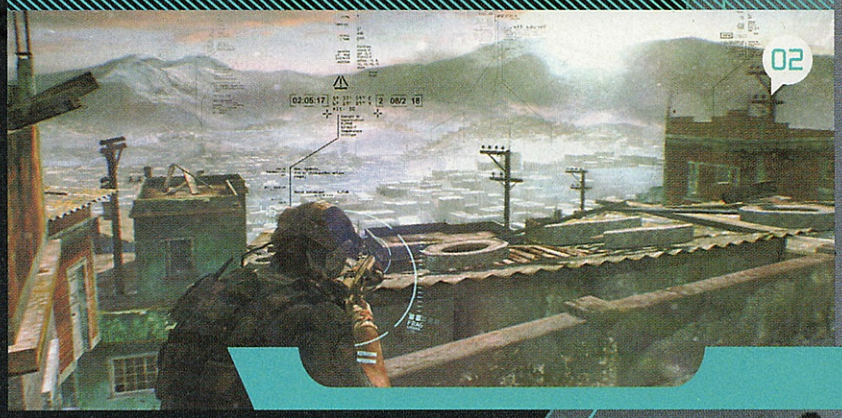
THE ENVIRONMENTS_ of *Ghost Recon: Future Soldier*

One of the more compelling aspects of the original *Ghost Recon* was the long distance at which you engaged the enemy. While this more accurately mimics real warfare, it means that you don't get to see all of the visceral gore that you may have come to expect from shooters. To meet players halfway, *Ghost Recon 2* somewhat closed those distances. With *Future Soldier*, I was glad to see that those long distances have returned.

"You'll notice just from the scale of the maps," Jacob says, "that the player has the ability to engage the enemy at great distances." Because of the way the gameplay works with the squads, Ghost Lead can collect intelligence that he shares with the other Ghosts before engaging the enemy.

As you would expect, the environments play a huge role in the game. For instance, in one level in Zambia, after taking down the cargo plane containing much-needed intelligence, the Ghosts walk into a violent sandstorm that essentially lowers their visibility to zero.

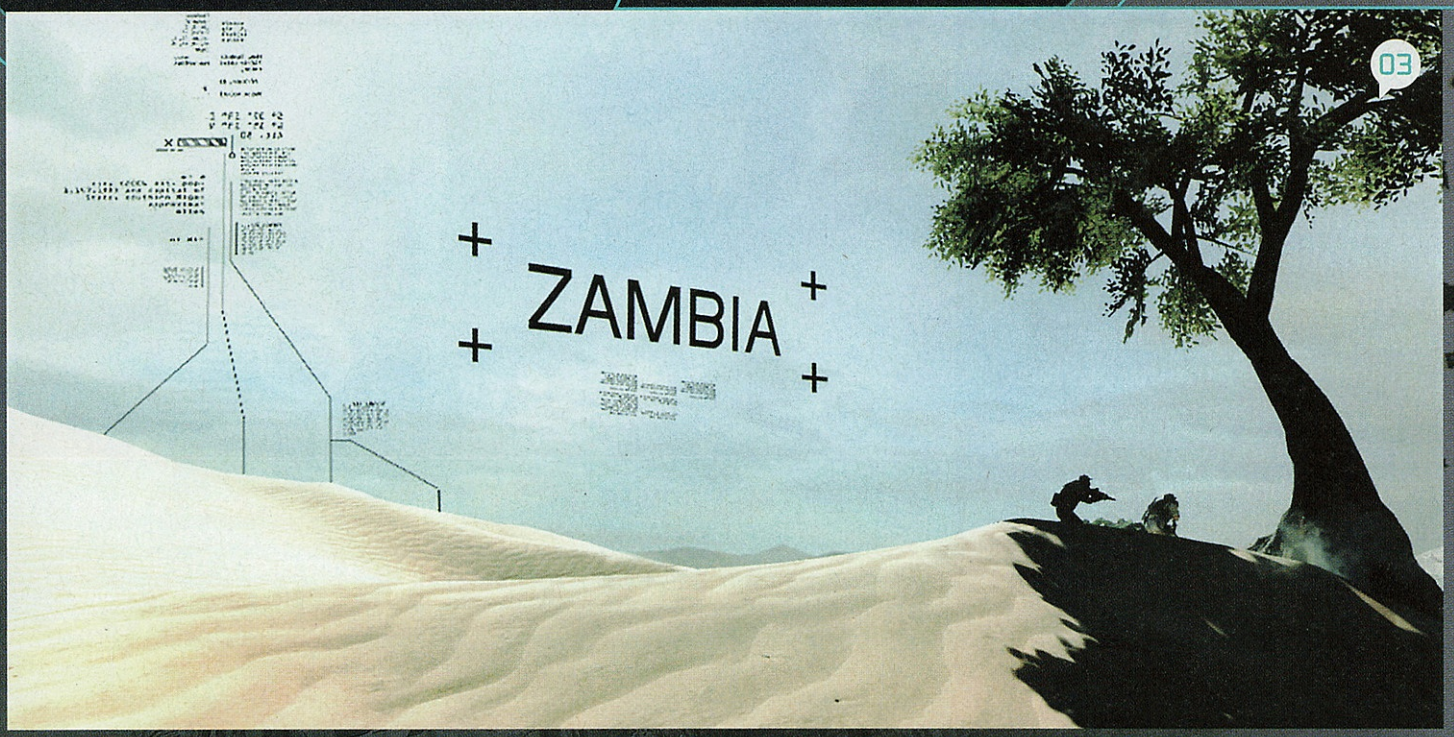
The game takes place in six locations. The Red Storm team gave up a trio of them— Zambia, Peshawar, and Moscow—but stayed mum on the other three locales.

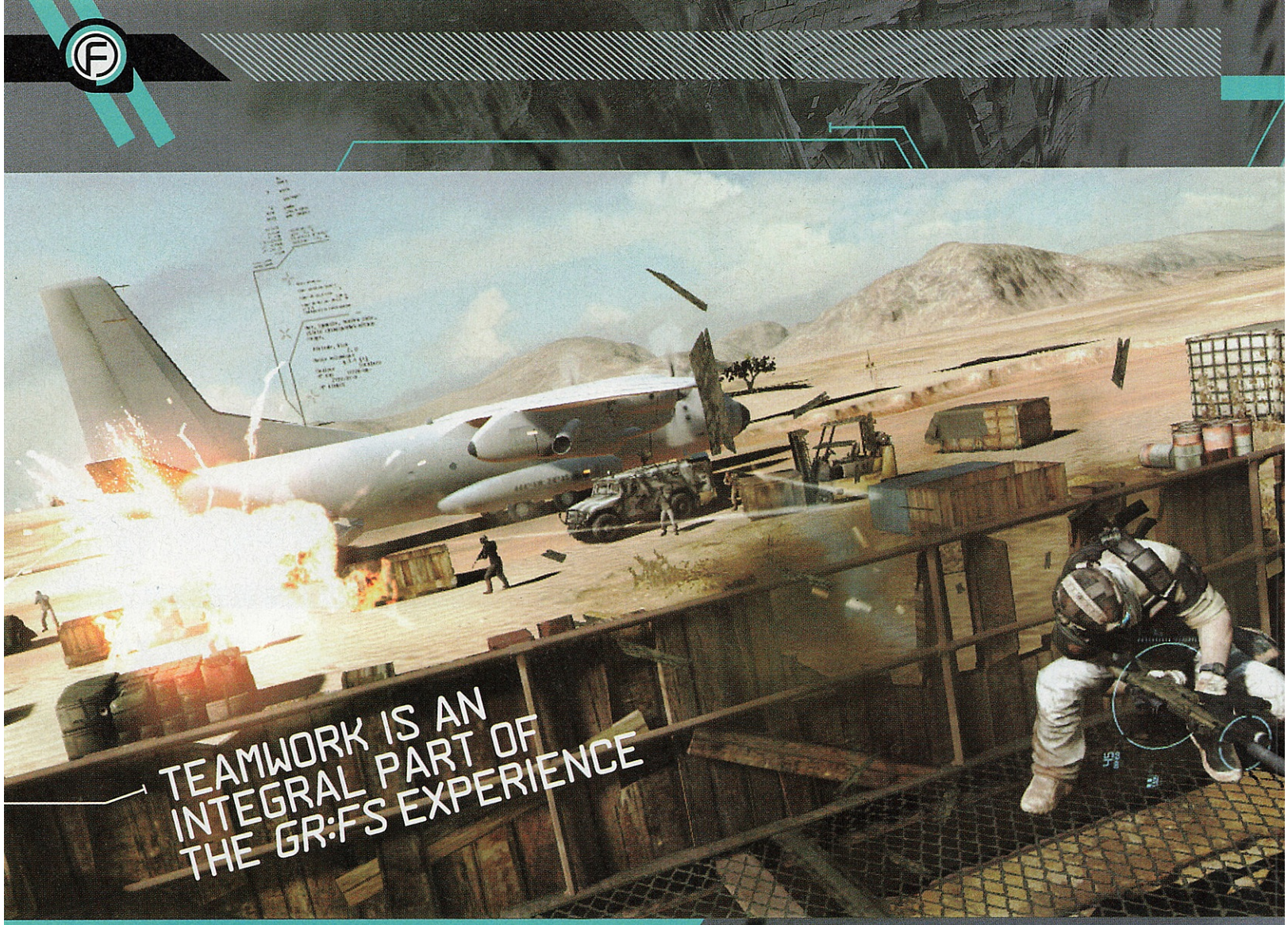


01 RUSSIA
Quite the jet-setters, the Ghosts find themselves battling all over the globe.

02 BOLIVIA
Expect a mix of close-quarters and wide-open combat.

03 ZAMBIA
In Zambia you'll not only fight mercenaries, but brutal dust storms as well.





FREQUENT FLIERS \\

Teamwork is an integral part of the *Ghost Recon: Future Soldier* experience. In one mission, the Ghosts have to collect intelligence guarded by a heavily armed militia. After locating the airfield, the team's objective is to bring down the plane (see above), to secure intelligence regarding who's running an illicit arms racket. Due to the mission's complexity and the sheer number of bad guys on the ground, coordination will be key. On the bright side, the game helpfully points out the plane's weak points when it's time for you to take it down.

**WHO LET THE DRONES OUT? ** Combat, intel, and teamwork are the three pillars of *Ghost Recon: Future Soldier*. To help in all three aspects, Ghost Lead will often deploy a surveillance drone prior to engaging the enemy. The drone has aerial capabilities as well as ground maneuverability, and it has also been rigged with the same cloaking abilities as your Ghosts, which should lend itself to a more stealthy approach. In the shot above, Ghost Lead uses the drone to pinpoint enemies and relay their locations back to the other Ghosts. Knowledge really is power.

ME AND MY FRIENDS
Positional awareness and knowing where your pals are will be key components in *Future Soldier*.

HANDS ON_

with *Ghost Recon: Future Soldier*

"In the future—or even now, if you have a cell phone—you're on the grid, so your positional information is accessible by many different means," Jacob says. "With the future soldier (this is even the case now), there's always an HQ that knows where you are as an individual soldier at all times on the battlefield."

This is where the game's second and third pillars—intel and teamwork—come into play. On the GR:FS battlefield, commanders will always know where their soldiers are. Additionally, "the Ghosts all have line-of-sight intelligence that they're able to share with their teammates," Jacob says. Simply put, if one of your teammates can see an enemy, you can see that enemy and all relevant data is displayed on your HUD (heads-up display).

If intel is king in GR:FS, then being able to disable it is the queen. "The concept behind the data hacking [in GR:FS] is promoting the value of intel. If I know where my enemies are at all times," Jacob says, "I have an advantage over them if they don't know where I am. In this regard, we've implemented a whole series of nonlethal takedowns, and equipment and methods that allow you to get into position to stun an enemy. And when they're in the downed state, you can hack into their system and download their intel and share it with your team. We refer to this as a 'data hack.'"

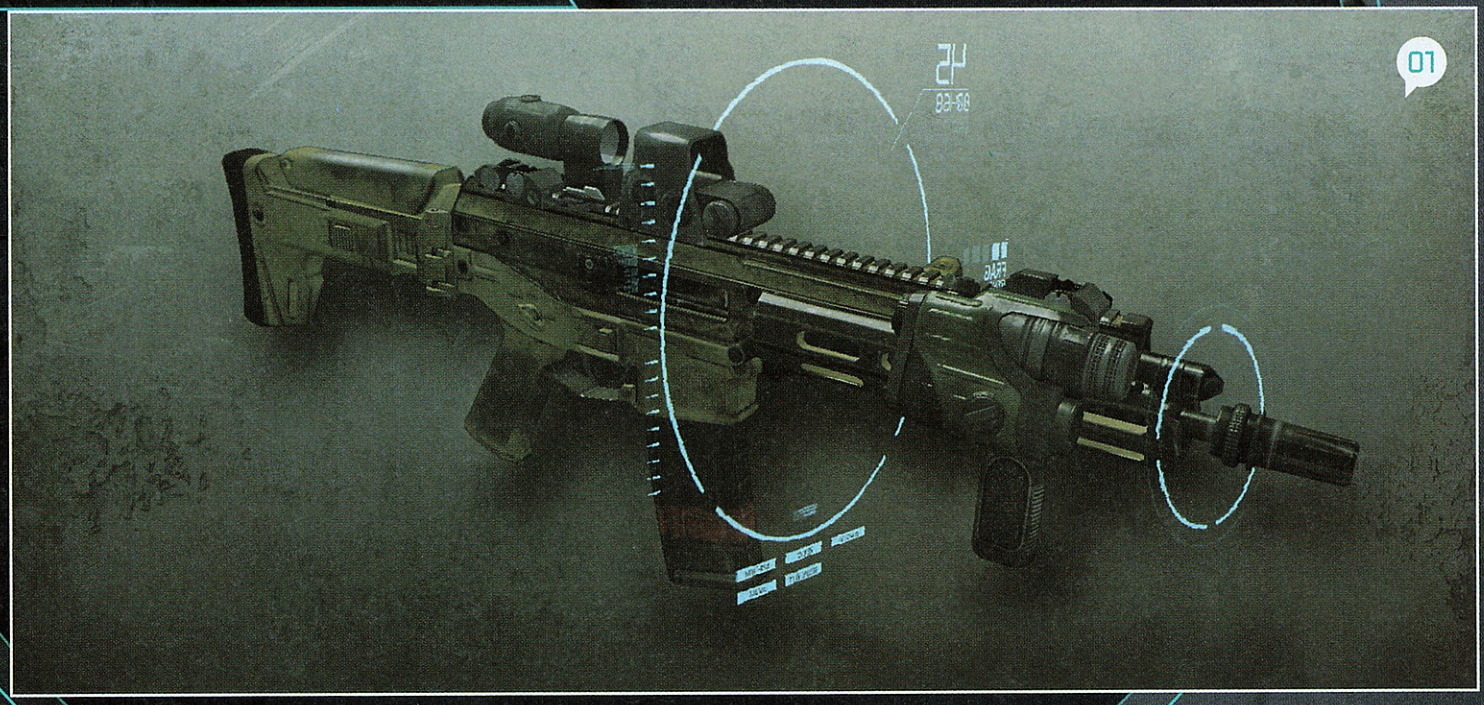
The folks at Red Storm also speak of this ability as "a limited power-play," where for between 45 seconds and a minute, while the enemy's system is coming back online or "re-encrypting," you'll have access to that enemy's intel. In other words, if he had positional information on his buddies...now so do you.

In an intelligence arms race such as this, there's also equipment available to counter these tactics. With the proper equipment you can place a jammer that creates a safe zone that shields you from such information breaches.

"The intel loop is one of more significant pillars in the game after combat," Jacob adds.

WEAPONS GALORE

THE GUN SHOW \\



Gun nuts are gonna love *Ghost Recon: Future Soldier*. With more than 50 individual weapons—from assault rifles and hand guns to light machine guns and stun guns, and what feels like countless accessories and attachments that you can add to each—you can spend hours just playing around in Gun Smith mode.

Using either Kinect on Xbox 360 or Move on PS3—or just a regular controller—you can spin the weapons around and, with the flick of a button, "explode" it to see the individual components "blown up." Hit the button again and the weapon flies back together.

While this may seem like a gun nut's fantasy come true, it actually has a purpose. As you progress through the game and unlock more weapons, accessories, and attachments, you can build custom weapons to suit individual circumstances.

The thing is, in the real world no one would go into battle having just built a gun without testing it first. *Future Soldier*'s Gun Smith mode thus lets you take your crazy contraptions to the gun range so you can test them out.

In one round, I built a light machine gun with a short barrel, short stock, and 250-round magazine. As you guessed, this baby was heavy, inaccurate, and unwieldy. Sure it was fun at the range, but you wouldn't want to lug this monster around in battle. The assault rifle below is simple and clean, having been outfitted with relatively simple optics, a shortened barrel, and a laser sight mounted to the front-right of the barrel. Red Storm is so obsessive about the weapons that you can customize everything on your guns, down to the trigger mechanisms.

Happy hunting!

01 LET'S GO!
Gun Smith mode is a great way to customize your weapons or just waste time.

02 REBUILD
In Gun Smith mode you can "explode" your weapon to get a closer look at the individual components.

THE ASSAULT RIFLE BELOW IS SIMPLE AND CLEAN

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS

HANDS-ON

GHOST RECON: FUTURE SOLDIER

INFO
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Red Storm
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

RELEASE DATE
March 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
4-player co-op online; up to 8-player competitive

GENRE
Third-person shooter

SUITABLE FOR
Shooter fans who want something more than your typical running and gunning

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Op Flash: Red River. Fans of more cerebral shooters will love *RR*'s pacing and combat.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Ghost Recon: Future Soldier*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Unique, stealth-based combat
- ❤ Team-based gameplay is a hoot

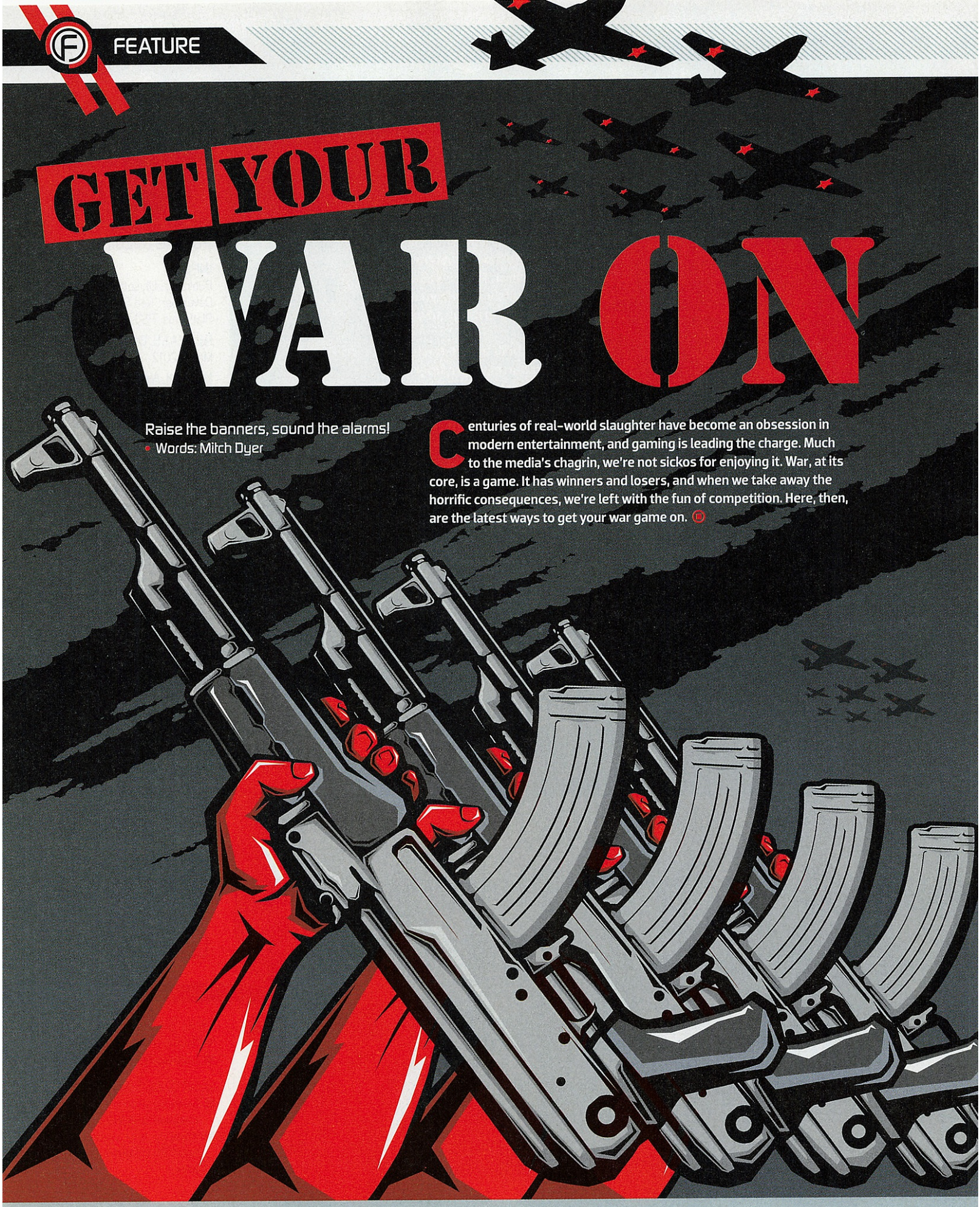
WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Relatively steep learning curve compared to other shooters
- ✖ Would like to be able to further tweak the compositions of the team

GET YOUR WAR ON

Raise the banners, sound the alarms!

• Words: Mitch Dyer

Centuries of real-world slaughter have become an obsession in modern entertainment, and gaming is leading the charge. Much to the media's chagrin, we're not sickos for enjoying it. War, at its core, is a game. It has winners and losers, and when we take away the horrific consequences, we're left with the fun of competition. Here, then, are the latest ways to get your war game on.



COVER ME
One well-placed grenade and this entire team of counter-terrorists is done for—you can't respawn in *CS*.

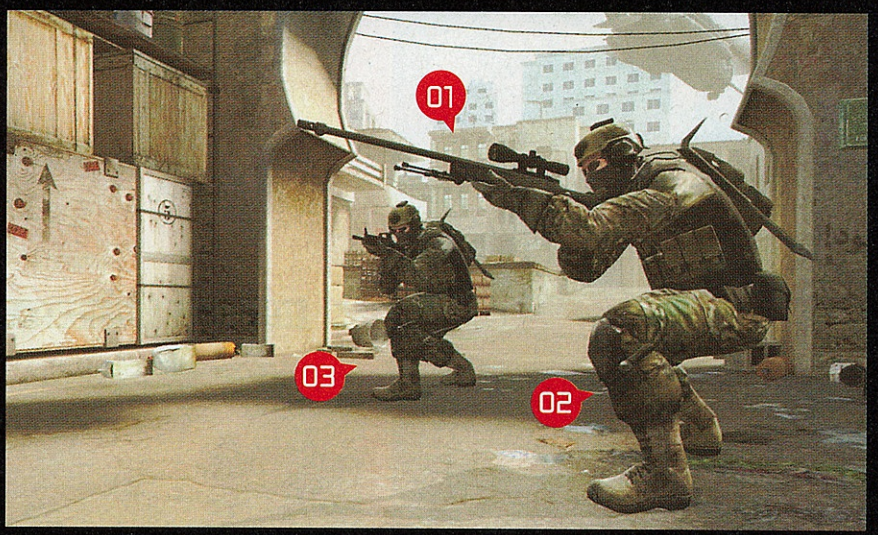
COUNTER-STRIKE: GLOBAL OFFENSIVE

Valve's most successful multiplayer shooter returns with...well, a lot of what made us fall head over heels for it in the first place. *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive* touches and tweaks level layouts and weapon efficiency for the sake of balance, but the classic maps, modes, and weapons will feel immediately and intimately familiar to PC veterans. The slow, careful plotting is still unlike most modern FPSs, and it's refreshing to go back to something like this after so much *Call of Duty*. Console gamers, for the first time since *Counter-Strike* hit the original Xbox, will also get to take down terrorists in tense, no-respawn multiplayer matches. *CS:GO* hits Xbox Live Arcade and the PlayStation Network alongside the PC release next year. \\

KICK ARSENAL

Gun Game, a classic *CS* mod *Black Ops* recently made popular, returns in *GO* under the name "Arsenal." Everyone starts with a pistol, and kills earn you better guns. Arsenal has two game types, Arms Race and Demolition. Valve's quiet on details.

BATTLE BROS \\



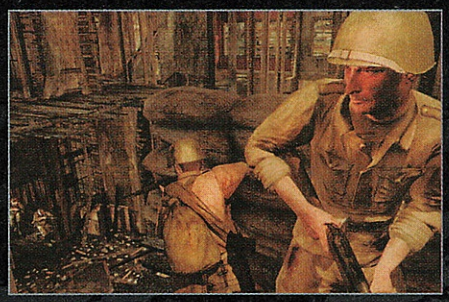
01 LONG SHOT
Snipers are great for thinning the enemy early. Just have a pistol handy in case of emergency.

02 LIGHTNING
The "Zeus" taser is a one-hit-kill weapon. The catch? One shot and it's out of ammo.

03 PATIENCE
Lying in wait or crouch-walking is far more likely to net you kills than running and gunning.

RED ORCHESTRA 2

Exploring the battlefields in *Red Orchestra 2: Heroes of Stalingrad* is more akin to a horror game than your usual World War II multiplayer game. Bullets, if you didn't know, are extremely dangerous—one shot will drop anyone dead. Each moment you're alive in this tactical PC-exclusive adds to the mounting tension of "when will death inevitably punch a hole in my head?" *Red Orchestra* forces you to constantly push forward for the sake of completing objectives, which naturally exposes you to equally anxious enemies. The natural reaction to seeing a tank is to wet yourself. *Red Orchestra* is as scary as it is strategic. It's the thinkin' gamer's shooter. It's where boys become sobbing men...kinda like real war, actually. \\



MAN DOWN
Objectives aren't always about killing jerks. Undetected infiltration is important to, say, violently arrest this target.

TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON: FUTURE SOLDIER

Ghost Recon has always been, basically, *Rainbow Six* outdoors. For one reason or another, love for team Rainbow faded and everyone fell for the Ghosts. *Future Soldier* is a definitive explanation as to why—*Ghost Recon* is always looking forward. The military technology you employ is impressive, making the future of war feel exciting.

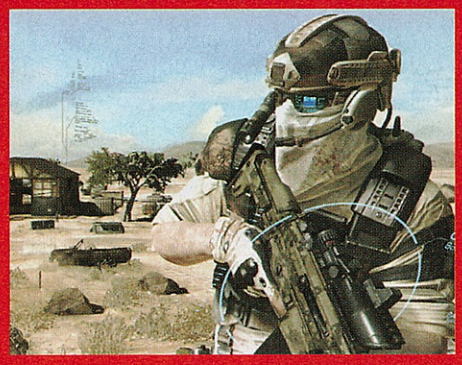
Invisibility is a clutch component of stealth in *GRFS*. Slow-moving stalkers will vanish, giving them the greatest opportunity to silently take down targets. This is particularly useful in multiplayer, where snipers risk wading out into the open or exposing their position for the sake of staying out of sight.

On the other hand, *Future Soldier* is a much faster *Ghost Recon* than we've all become accustomed to. Players sprint like Olympians, smoothly slip from one cover point to the next, and always seems to be on the move. This isn't to say multiplayer matches are chaotic and uncontrollable. Quite the opposite, they're as tactical as we want 'em to be, minus the boring bits. (This is the campaign's philosophy, too.) \\

For more on *Ghost Recon: Future Soldier* don't miss our cover story on page 36.

HEADS-UP DISPLAY \\

▲ Digital overlays aren't anything new to *Ghost Recon*, but they're more thorough in the future.



▲ Deserts, cities, seaside towns...expect a solid amount of variety and detail in *Future Soldier*.

SPEC OPS: THE LINE

We haven't heard much about this upcoming squad-based shooter in the last year. We're hoping this means the developer is working too hard to tell us anything. What we've always known about *Spec Ops: The Line* still intrigues us. Sand is a significant variable during the single-player campaign, and not just because storms of it obscure sight. Drifting dunes create and block new paths in dynamic, unpredictable, and largely random ways. We're surprised nobody's cribbed that idea since it was revealed, but hey.

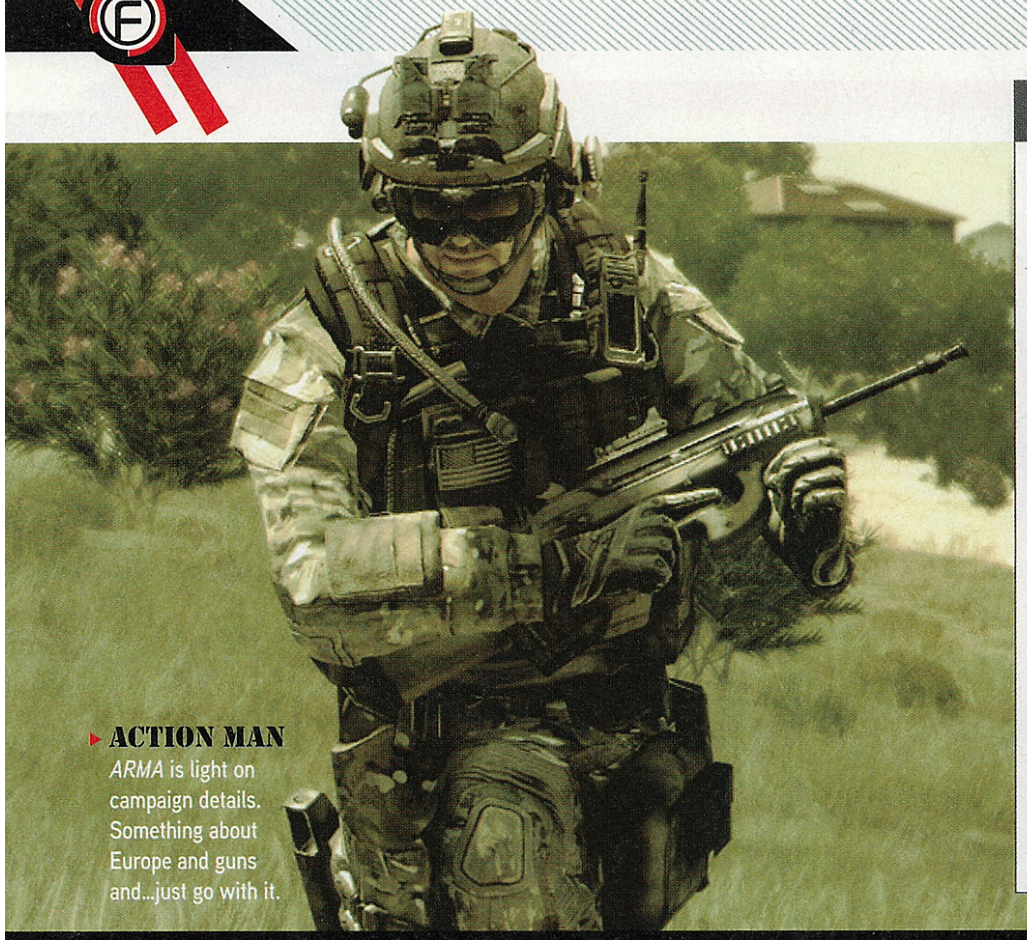
Tonally, the campaign has harsher violence than most military games—it's all alarmingly real. Dried blood sticks to bombed-out roads, charred bodies are scattered all over a desolate Dubai, and innocent civilians can take sickening gunshots to the face. *The Line* is meant to be an unsettling experience, and we're hoping to get a deeper look at how we'll take part in it when the multiplayer beta launches next year.

COVER UP
Stuff always seems to be on fire over there, doesn't it?

TOGETHERNESS

Developer Yager and publisher 2K have talked a little bit about *Spec Ops* having some sort of co-op mode, but details are scant beyond the idea of its existence. The campaign seems to have a bunch of dudes around, so why not include it there? Please, no wave-based killing.

RETRO If you're morbidly curious about the origins of *Spec Ops*, the original PlayStation games are available on PSN for a few bucks each. They were messy, awful shooters, but were really ahead of their time. *Spec Ops*, while ugly and almost unplayable even at the time, certainly laid the path for *SOCOM* and other modern military shooters that'd later do what we now adore.



ACTION MAN
ARMA is light on campaign details. Something about Europe and guns and...just go with it.

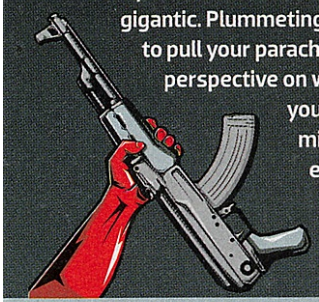
WHERE ARE YOU

While one squad is on the ground infiltrating an area, another can poke around in a chopper above—and be miles away. The massive size of *ARMA III*'s open world means you aren't limited to everyone around you. Go on, soldier, toward adventure!

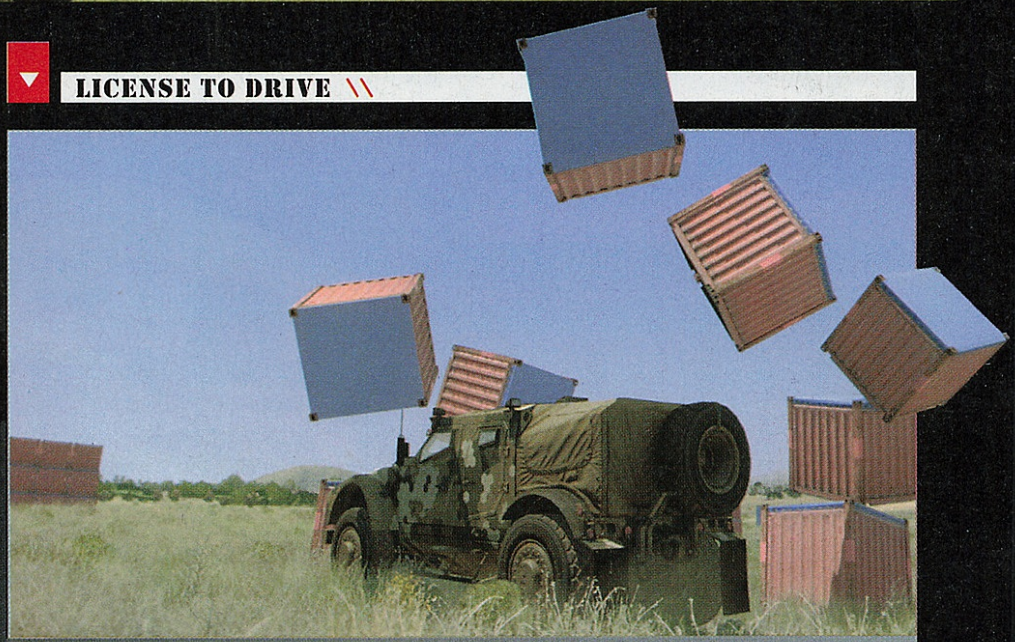
ARMA III

The open world of the ARMA series isn't quite like anything else in gaming. It enables something far stronger, deeper, and more meaningful than your typical co-op campaign or competitive multiplayer flag-capturing. Really, the uncertainty of how you'll react to everything around you, and how each battle will play out, is what makes these games so stellar. *ARMA III* replicates its past while pulling it into the present.

The emergent stories from lengthy multiplayer matches can make for some of the most memorable moments in any game you'll play. *ARMA III* only adds to that with new vehicles, improved physics, underwater navigation, and piles of other improvements. Plus, it's crazy-pretty. Also, gigantic. Plummeting to the earth waiting to pull your parachute gives you a solid perspective on what's in store, where you can go, and what you might be able to do. Get excited, then suck all of ARMA in. \\



LICENSE TO DRIVE \\



HEY LOOK!
ARMA III has physics! PhysX, actually, which gives its ragdoll deaths and other movements a nice, realistic look.

GET AROUND
Vehicles have always been an important part of *ARMA*, in land, sea, and air. Expect more this time around.

MEET THE LEADS
Our boys, from left to right, are Chok, Stitch, Crockett, and Montana.

BROTHERS IN ARMS: FURIOUS FOUR

Finally, a World War II game is embracing the idea of guns as a *really good time*. Strangely, it's Gearbox's *Brothers in Arms*, a first-person shooter series traditionally revered for its authenticity and emotionally devastating stories. Nah, forget all that sappy mumbo-jumbo—this game screams 'let's brand some Nazis with a cattle prod.' *Furious Four* is a bit bonkers in tone, and that's why we love every fiber of its senselessly violent being.

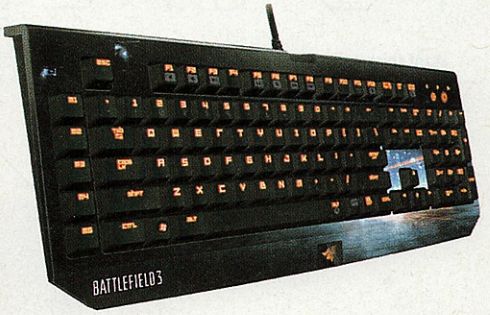
As in *Bulletstorm*, you'll be rewarded for how you go about killing everyone around you. The more sadistic your methods, the higher the score. The drive behind such colorful, crude killing is, of course, to murder Adolf Hitler. Naturally, *Furious Four* is built for four players. Make sure to bring a couple beloved sociopaths with you to tase, torch, and utterly obliterate those Nazi jerks.

LET'S KILL NAZIS!

The *Furious Four* reveal trailer has some striking conceptual similarities to a certain Quentin Tarantino film about guys killing Nazis for fun. The movie had no game, so *Furious Four* will do nicely.

WAR GEAR

When it comes to the incredible sights and sounds of *Battlefield 3* or *Modern Warfare*, you want to get the best experience possible. Of all the fancy branded hardware available, this is the stuff that got our attention the most.



RAZER BLACKWIDOW

The BlackWidow's keys are aligned in such a way that you can easily reach up to the function keys, as well as the five programmable macro keys.

RAZER IMPERATOR

Goofy as the Imperator may look, 6400 DPI should be plenty sensitive when you take to the skies in a sweet jet.

EAR FORCE DELTA

Turtle Beach's *Modern Warfare 3* headset is a modified XP500. A 7.1 wireless beast, if you can't find this baby, the standard XP500 will do just fine.

PAPERCRAFT

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GHOST RECON: FUTURE SOLDIER

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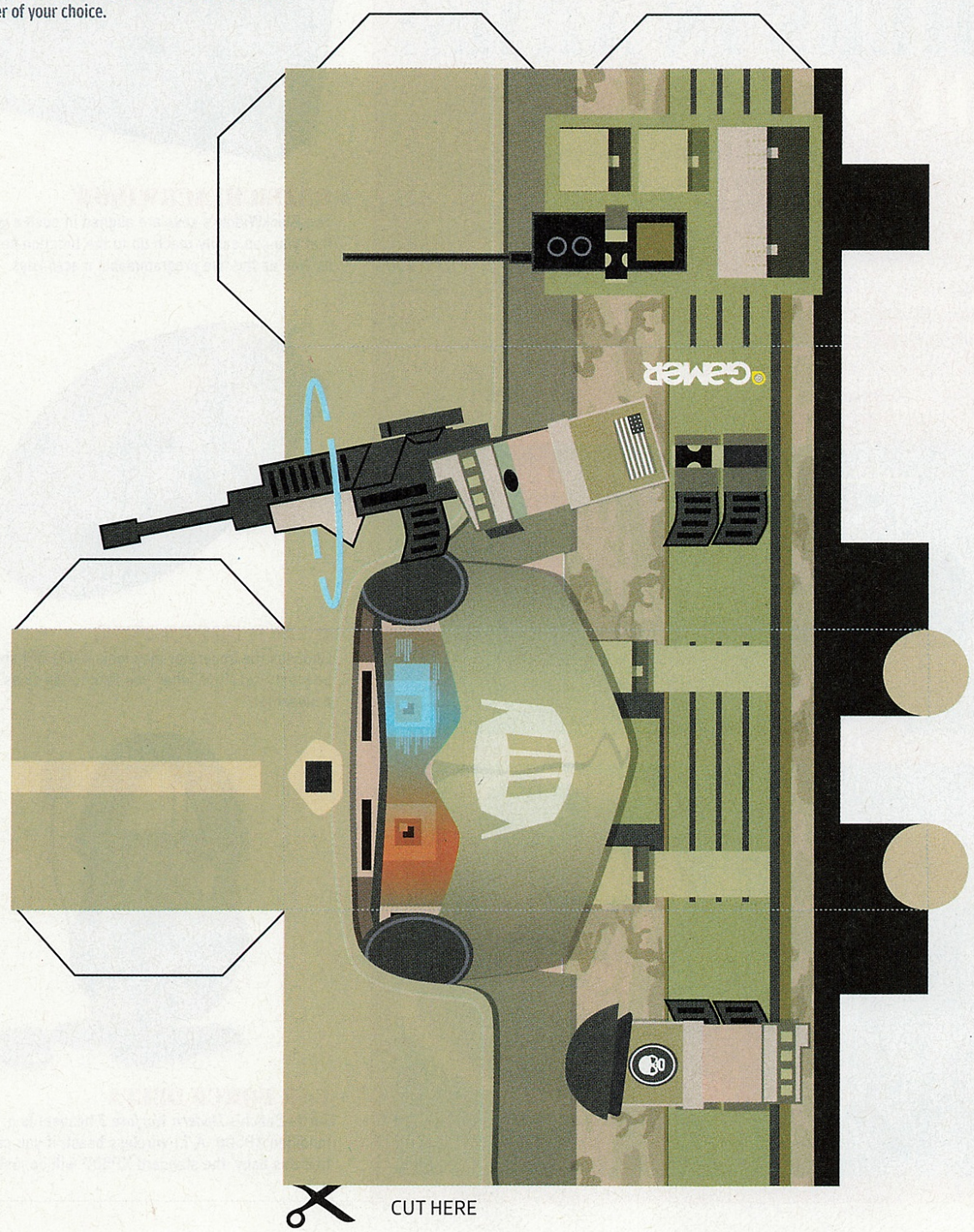

CUT HERE

MAKE ME!

TOP PICKS

RATINGS BREAKDOWN:

@GAMER includes only the best games in our Top Picks section. If you don't see it here, it's probably not worth getting.

- An average game. Just worthy enough to call to your attention.
- A good game with some flaws. Fans of the genre will probably enjoy it.
- An excellent game that we strongly recommend.
- A near-perfect gaming experience.

56 BATTLEFIELD 3

Hey, meet the crew!

@GAMER wants you to know about the best-of-the-best games out now or coming soon, so we've put together a different kind of Geek Squad to help you out.

This month, we ask the gamer panel:

Your favorite gamer unwraps a holiday gift from you. What's inside?

David Chapman

A Gamer's Survival Kit, with copies of *Uncharted 3*, *Assassin's Creed Revelations*, and *Skyrim*...plus all of the energy drinks and snacks needed for the sleepless nights ahead.

Lizzie Cuevas

My favorite gamer would probably already have *Halo: Combat Evolved Anniversary* and a 3D HDTV, so if I bought that for him, I'd end up keeping it for myself. Smart shopping!

Mitch Dyer

When that special someone opens my gift, he'll see a PC copy of *Batman: Arkham City*, so he can play it again. And, hey...what a coincidence—his name is also Mitch Dyer.

Chuck Osborn

My gift will be courtesy of Nintendo: good games for the 3DS. Such a great system...such a lousy slate of launch titles. *Super Mario 3D Land* and *Mario Kart 7* are almost here!

TOP PICKS

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74 SPIDER-MAN: EDGE OF TIME
75 RAYMAN ORIGINS

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77 NASCAR Unleashed
77 Sonic Generations
78 The House of the Dead: Overkill—Extended Cut
78 The Cursed Crusade
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79 Might & Magic Heroes VI
80 Hole in the Wall: Deluxe Edition
81 Pro Evolution Soccer 2012
81 Pokémon Rumble Blast
82 Mahjong Cub3d
82 Tetris Axis
82 Cooking Mama 4: Kitchen Magic
83 Go Vacation
83 Raving Rabbids: Alive & Kicking

NOT PICKS

The following games did not make the *@GAMER* cut:

- *Frogger 3D*
- *Hulk Hogan's Main Event*

CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE 3

Are you ready to save the world? • Words: Andrew Hayward

Doubtful *Modern Warfare 3* can keep the series's unprecedented winning streak alive? Don't be: It's every bit as polished and expertly crafted as any previous *Call of Duty* experience, and amazingly finds new ways to keep the annual shooter smash from overstaying its welcome.

Modern Warfare 3 concludes the narrative trilogy started by the brilliant 2007 entry, and in typical *Call of Duty* fashion, the single-player campaign weaves through explosive setpieces on a worldwide trek, letting you control multiple heroes on the trail of a terrorist. Admittedly, the wow factor isn't as strong this time around, as the scripted events are easily anticipated and new scenarios utilize beats similar to past ones, generating fewer surprises. But with staggeringly slick presentation, several fantastic moments, and a more cohesive storyline than *Modern Warfare 2*, it remains a satisfying solo affair.

...POLISHED AND EXPERTLY CRAFTED...

The series has become much more multiplayer-centric over the years, and despite holding onto that same formula, *Modern Warfare 3* manages to deliver fresh thrills. Tweaks to killstreaks and a new weapon-ranking system help level the playing field a bit, plus the new Kill Confirmed mode—where teams battle to collect fallen foes' dog tags—holds its own with the past favorites. But I really had a blast with the customizable private-match modes, which mix some of *Black Ops*'s Wager Matches with unique new options. Seriously, there's nothing like being one of 17 players launching rockets at one heavily armored Juggernaut opponent.

And with the expanded Spec Ops mode offering both quick-hit missions and lengthier co-op survival trials, *Modern Warfare 3* takes the form of a true triple threat—one that'll keep virtual guns ablaze until the next *Call of Duty* takes its place.

DUTY CALLS
Wield an impressive arsenal on the hunt for Makarov.

▼ The *Modern Warfare* engine still spins some impressively detailed sights.

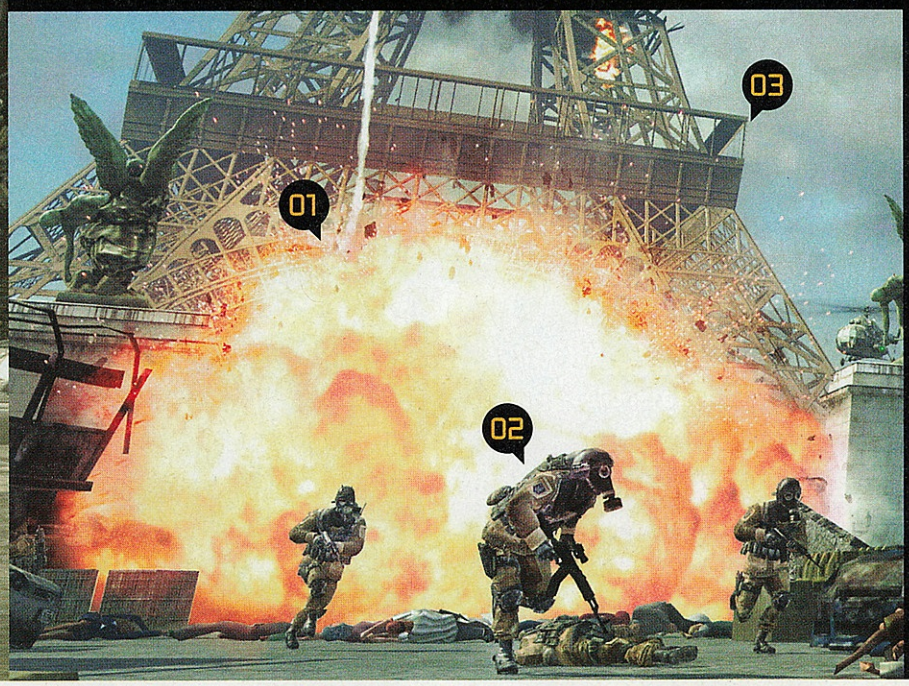
A CLAIM TO FLAME... \\

01 KABOOM
It's not a *Call of Duty* adventure without ample explosions, and *Modern Warfare 3* is no slouch.

02 MASKED
Note the protective masks here. Let's just say the air quality in the future isn't quite what it used to be.

03 SIGHTS
Even beloved tourist destinations aren't safe from *Modern Warfare* mayhem. Sorry, Eiffel Tower.

GLOBETROTTER
Between the campaign's international destinations and the 16 multiplayer maps, you'll see a wide variety of settings throughout the game. Dingy street markets like this make for strategic team battles, while the sight of a burning New York City may well distract you on first glance.



RESPECCED
Spec Ops mode includes solo and co-op (local or online) challenges with a separate ranking system. The Survival stages are the real standout here, offering tense, exciting, and lengthy battles.

PS3 XBOX 360 Wii PC

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE 3

INFO
Publisher: Activision
Developer: Infinity Ward/ Sledgehammer Games
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, PC
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
November 8, 2011

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 18-player competitive online, 2-player co-op online, up to 4-player competitive splitscreen local, 2-player co-op splitscreen local

GENRE
First-person shooter

SUITABLE FOR
Multiplayer nuts, couch co-op fans

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

WHAT'S GREAT:
❤ Varied, well-produced campaign that's much better than *Modern Warfare 2*'s

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
✖ Campaign follows very familiar series structure

WIL SAYS:
MW3 multiplayer will dominate many of my nights, as have myriad *CoD* games before it. Oh, woe is me!

OVERALL RATING:
4.75

OFFICIAL Gamer

▼ It's so peaceful up here. Can't say the same for down there.

SHIELD UP
Riot shields never seemed so effective before *MW3*. You'll see.

ELITE STATUS

Launching alongside Modern Warfare 3 is Call of Duty: Elite, a new service from Activision that offers impressively detailed stat tracking across MW3 and Black Ops, clan-management tools, competitions with real-life prizes, and ways to improve your game and better learn the maps. Elite is not only easily accessible on your console, but you can also connect to it via the web and a mobile app (which is available in iPhone and Android flavors). The basic service is free of charge, while the premium subscription ($49.99) comes with all of the MW3 map packs, exclusive video content, clan challenges, and daily competitions that offer more alluring rewards.

FAVORED FIREARMS

In place of Black Ops's weapon customization is a new weapon-ranking system, which levels up your primary and secondary firearms with continued use. Doing so unlocks access to all sorts of goodies with which to deck out your guns, including special abilities, attachments, reticles, and camouflage.

▲ In Kill Confirmed, golden dog tags drop with fallen enemies, and it's your team's goal to collect the most.

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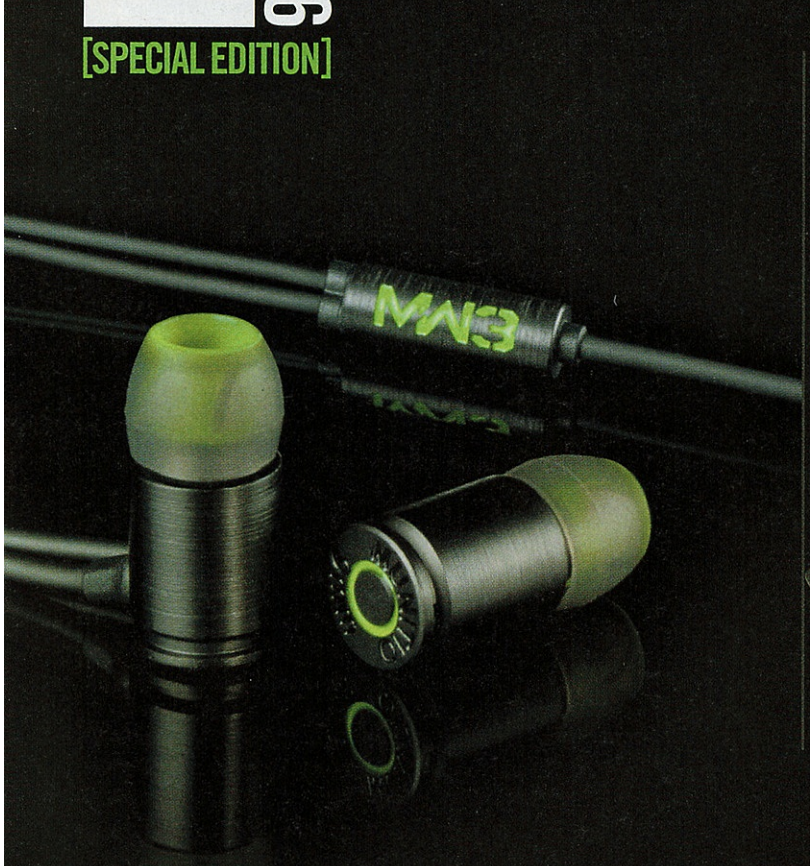

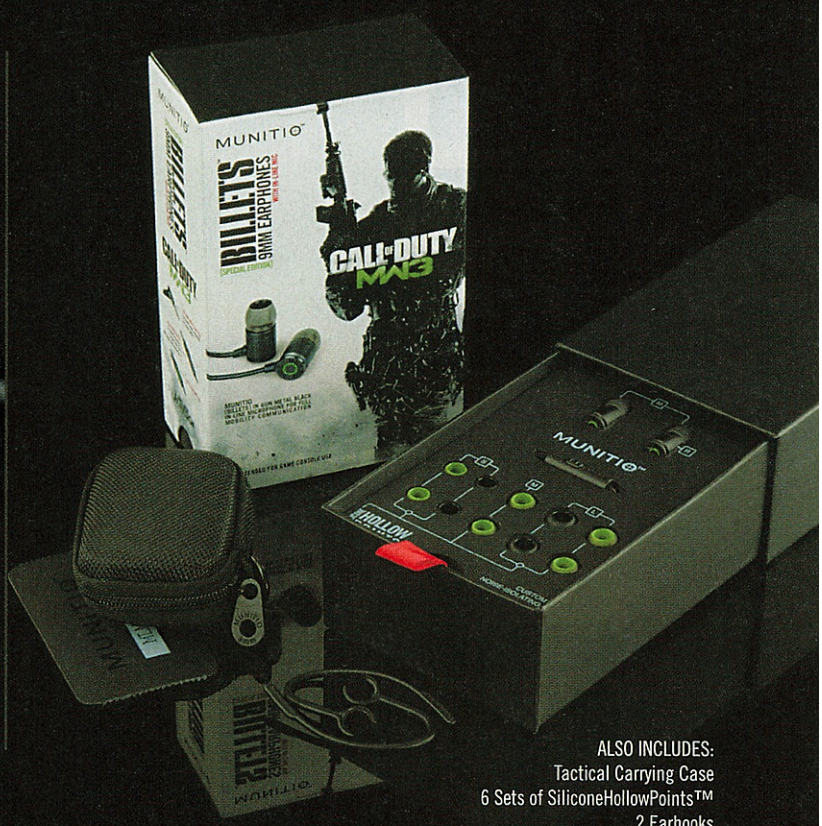

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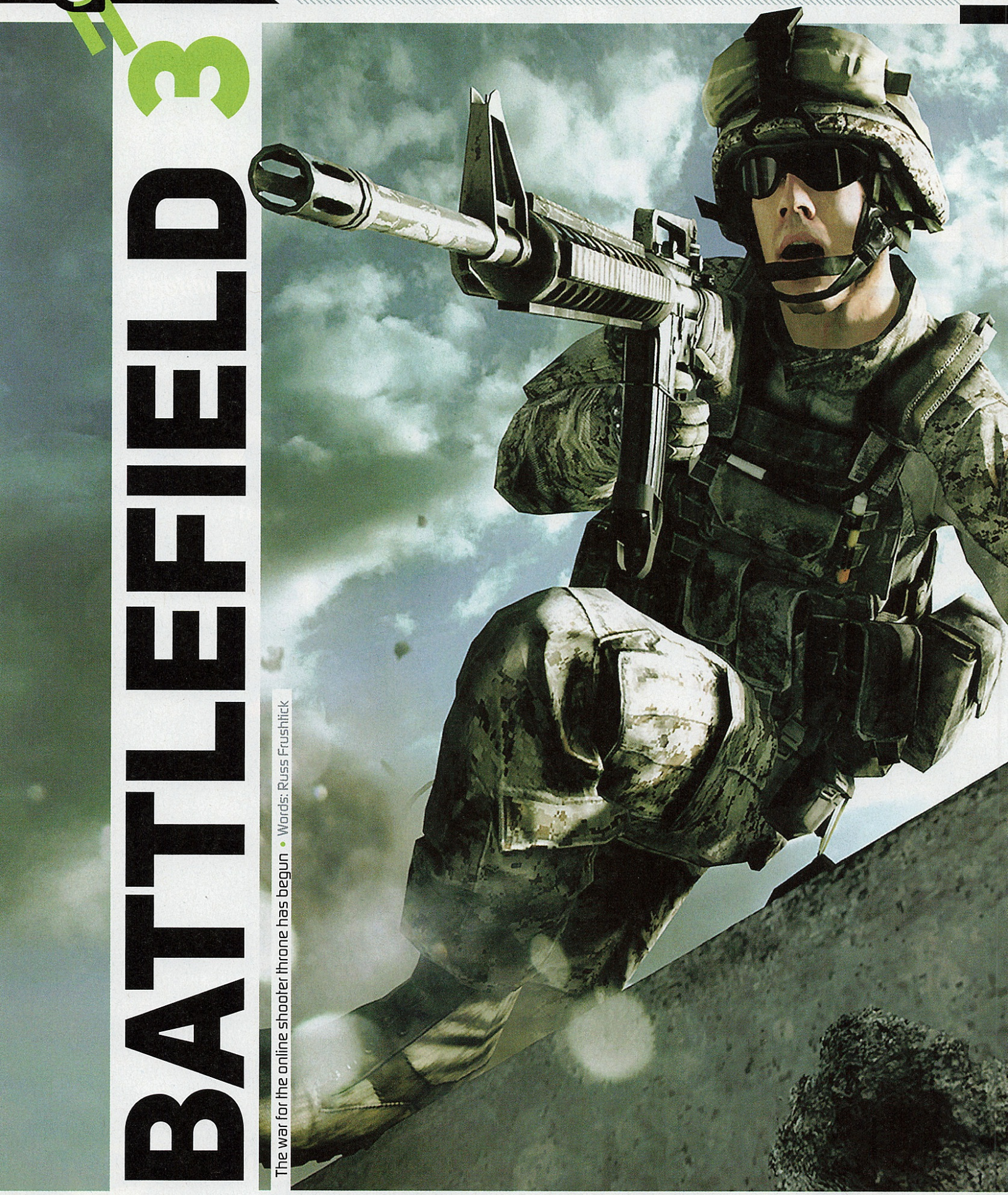
BATTLEFIELD 3

The war for the online shooter throne has begun • Words: Russ Frushtick



▲ The new Frostbite 2 engine allows for some insanely huge maps and gorgeous views.

▲ Vehicles are still a big part of *Battlefield*. Tanks, helicopters, and jets are ready and waiting to be crashed.

You may think that intense gaming rivalries ended when Mario and Sonic kissed and made up, but this holiday season brings one of the most anticipated franchise wars in recent memory: *Battlefield 3* versus *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3*. *BF3* had the benefit of firing the first shot, releasing several weeks before *CoD*, but does it have enough to unseat the reigning online shooter king? Not quite yet, it seems.

BF3 is, first and foremost, an online, multiplayer-centric shooter. This installment brings with it a whole new graphics engine, nine new maps, and some varied player classes to mix up the gameplay. Fans of *Battlefield: Bad Company 2* will undoubtedly notice a major leap in *BF3*'s visuals, which boast incredible-looking maps scattered all over the globe. The Frostbite 2 engine is just as capable rendering a demolished Parisian street as it is a desolate desert in the Middle East, and new lighting effects really give a greater sense of reality.

Another big improvement is on the weapons front. *BF3*'s guns feel considerably more powerful than in past games, with every pull of the trigger feeling like it could do serious damage.

The multiplayer is, on the whole, terrific, though there can be issues when playing with large groups of friends (which may be rectified by the time you read this). If your group is bigger than four people, you're going to have a heck of a time getting everyone into the same match.

The entertaining multiplayer modes are matched with a decidedly underwhelming single-player campaign. The story revolves around a nuclear plot that's never fully explained and which stars characters whose actions would make Jack Bauer blush. Worse still, the gameplay is nothing short of boring. *Bad Company 2*'s charm, with its wide-open maps and epic destruction, is replaced with narrow, corridor-like maps set in bland interiors made of indestructible concrete. Vehicles—a *Battlefield* specialty—are hardly present, and the whole campaign feels rushed and half-hearted.

If you're looking for an excellent competitive multiplayer game to play with buddies, *Battlefield 3* delivers. Solo players should probably hold off for *Modern Warfare 3*, though.

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

BATTLEFIELD 3

INFO
Publisher: EA
Developer: DICE
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
October 25, 2011

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-player co-op online; up to 24-player competitive online (console); up to 64-player competitive online (PC)

GENRE
First-person shooter

SUITABLE FOR
Team-oriented shooter enthusiasts; lone wolves need not apply

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Excellent online multiplayer
- ❤ Gorgeous environments
- ❤ Guns feel great

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Dull, nonsensical campaign mode
- ✖ Lacking co-op component
- ✖ Forced EA Origin integration

WIL SAYS:
Arghhh...shooter overload! I don't mean that to sound negative, but more that it'll be hard to choose what to play.

OVERALL RATING:
4

OFFICIAL GAMER

A FRIEND IN NEED
A series of six co-op missions can be played online with another player. Separate from the campaign, these missions offer some nice variety (flying a helicopter while your buddy acts as gunner, for example), but they are far too difficult for most players and suffer from the same issues as the campaign.

KEEPING THINGS CLASSY
Battlefield 3 reworks the classes: There are now just four classes instead of the usual five. The Assault class and the Medic class have been melded into the Combat Medic, who can blast away with assault rifles while reviving squadmates. The Support class has also been boosted with the addition of implacable machine guns and suppressive fire, which causes an enemy's vision to blur when fired upon. The Engineer and Recon classes are still mostly the same, though you'll be pleased to know that spotting snipers is now easier thanks to a new scope glint.

YET ANOTHER USER NAME
Like comparing yourself to friends? Get ready to sign up for Origin. The only way to compare stats (even on PS3 and Xbox 360) is through EA's proprietary network. It's an annoying move, but on the bright side, EA's Battlelog service is robust for stat junkies looking to brag.

▼ Guns are *Battlefield 3*'s true stars. From shotguns to SMGs to rocket launchers, the weaponry feels realistic and powerful.

DEAD RISING 2: OFF THE RECORD

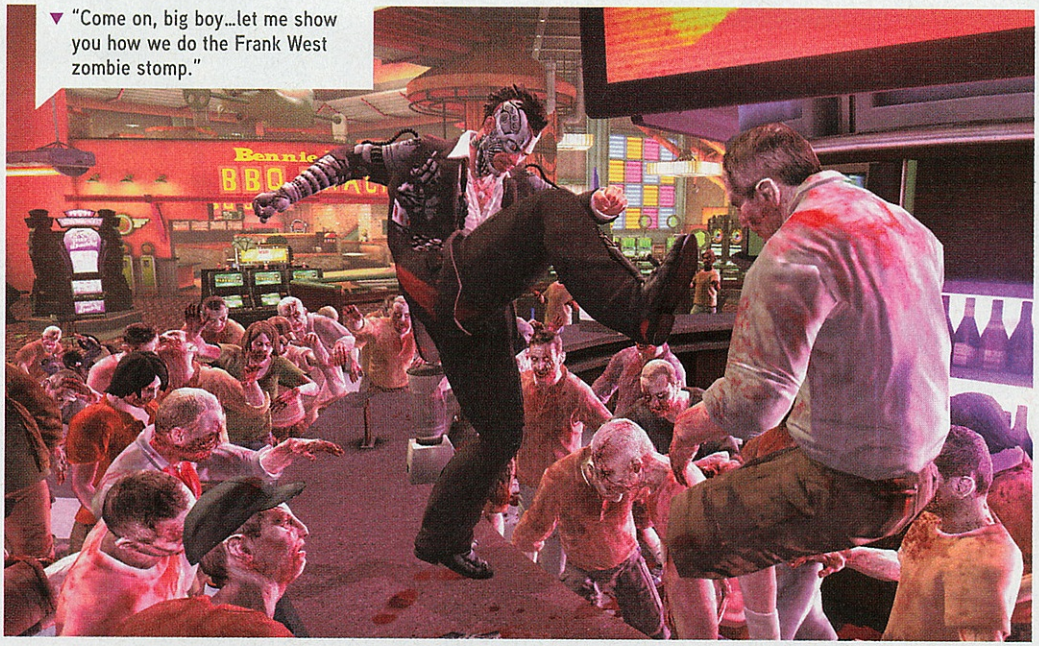
More like "Retread" Rising • Words: Nellie Johnson

Question: Why would Capcom release a game, then a year later, release it again? Is it hoping we're all suffering short-term memory loss? (Okay, that's two questions.) The idea's bizarre, but that's what's happened with the release of *Dead Rising 2: Off the Record*.

Dead Rising 2 starred motocross champion Chuck Greene, but with fans not liking Chuck very well, *Off the Record* brings back *Dead Rising*'s original hero, Frank West. Older, wiser, and 40 pounds heavier, the down-on-his-luck photojournalist is reduced to competing on hideous game show "Terror is Reality," where he finds himself smack in the middle of a second zombie outbreak.

Capcom's calling *Off the Record* a "reimagining" of the outbreak at Fortune City, but the sad truth is, not a lot here has been reimagined. Sure, Frank now looks like Dan Aykroyd (in his post-*Ghostbusters* days) but otherwise, the game is *Dead Rising 2* in a new box. New things consist of a theme park called "Uranus Zone," a few new combo weapons, a smattering of new or slightly reworked missions, and an untimed sandbox mode. Unfortunately, most of the game is a retread of old content, with long load times and clunky controls.

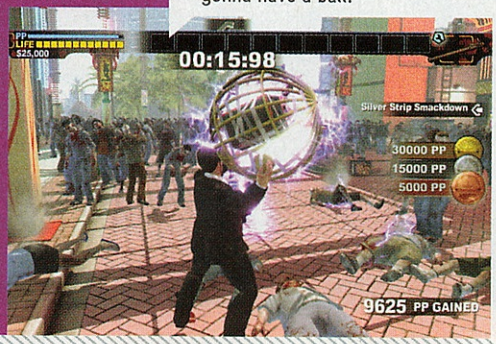
That said, *Dead Rising 2* had some fun things to offer, and your *Off the Record* experience depends on whether you've played its predecessor. Subtle changes, improved performance, and a bargain price make *Off the Record* a good way for first-timers to experience the Fortune City storyline. If you've played *Dead Rising 2*, however, you'll notice it's not just the denizens of Fortune City who are beginning to get a little stale.



▼ "Come on, big boy...let me show you how we do the Frank West zombie stomp."

FRANK WEST: BIGGER, NOT BADDER

Frank's new, more substantial build—that's a kind way of putting it, right?—doesn't come in as handy as you might think. While now he can fill out an Elvis jumpsuit like nobody's business, that also makes him a bigger target, but he hasn't gained any attack power to take on his undead fan club. So, really, all the weight has done for him is make his goofy outfits even goofier. Who knew Daisy Dukes came in "husky"?



▼ "Hey, get ready, because you're gonna have a ball!"

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

DEAD RISING 2: OFF THE RECORD

INFO
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Blue Castle Games
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC
Reviewed on: PS3

RELEASE DATE
October 11, 2011

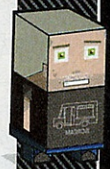
MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-player online co-op

GENRE
Action-adventure

SUITABLE FOR
People who haven't already played *Dead Rising 2* and dream of killing zombies as Dan Aykroyd

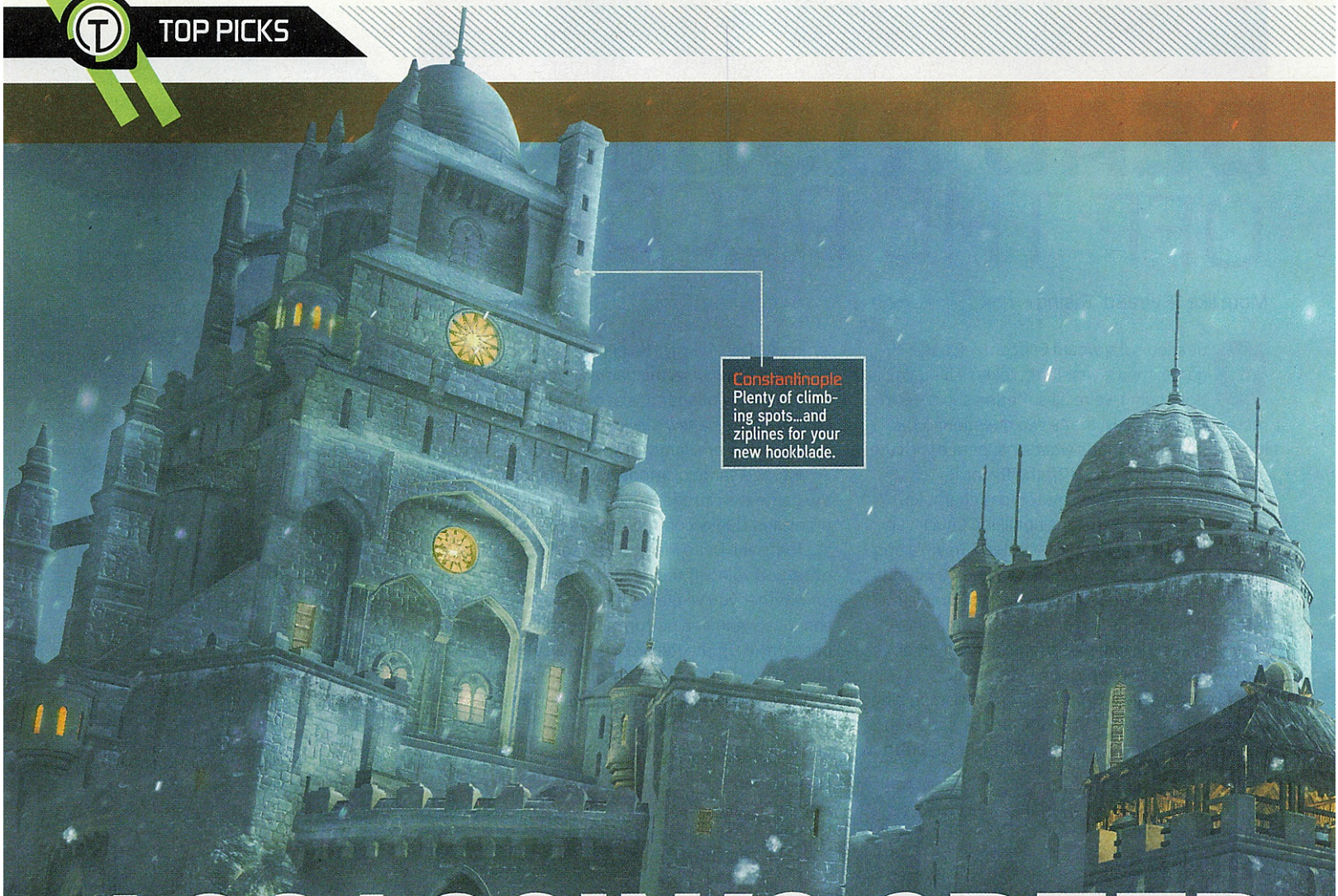
WHAT'S GREAT:
❤ There's nothing like watching a fat man kick zombie tail in his underwear

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
✖ A "new" game filled with 85% old content



ANDY SAYS:
Off the Record seems to be a "What If...?" experiment that Capcom thought would be fun for fans. Even with a lower price, it doesn't really click.

OVERALL RATING:



ASSASSIN'S CREED REVELATIONS

The story is strong with this one... • Words: Andy Eddy

Assassin's Creed Revelations has big shoes to fill; coming fourth in a popular franchise will bring about that kind of anticipation. However, Ubisoft does a good job of not fumbling the ball, delivering a solid sequel for series fans while making the game accessible to first-timers—and setting the stage for what will surely be another installment that picks up where this one leaves off.

If you played *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood*, you'll feel right at home. The story picks up with modern-day protagonist Desmond Miles in a coma (following *Brotherhood*'s conclusion) and needing to play out the 16th-century adventures of his ancestor, Ezio Auditore, that are contained in his DNA. In turn, Ezio is on the trail to collect "Masyaf keys" that his ancestor, Altaïr, had scattered around Constantinople. These keys enable Ezio to ride along on some of Altaïr's memories and decisions, so he'll understand what set him off to follow his predecessor's footsteps. Though the Ezio/Altaïr narrative ends with *Revelations*, it's clear that the story will continue in other ways.

Gameplay comes in many forms, from the "traditional" story missions, town rebuilding, and item pick-ups that we've seen in previous AC titles; to 3D platform-style puzzles within Desmond's semi-hospitalization connected to the Animus's "safe mode"; to strategic multiplayer matches in various modes of play. Story weaves nicely throughout the gameplay (even multiplayer has a separate storyline), and a few of the cut-scenes might elicit some emotion... perhaps even a tear.

On the down side, there are still moments when unintended control issues crop up (which may, for example, send Ezio leaping from a wall rather than up to the next handhold), but they're few enough—and usually just temporary setbacks—to not wreck the experience.

Mostly, what I expect from a sequel is to provide continuity with the previous game's story and improve on the gameplay—*Revelations* meets both of those criteria. Much like its leading-man protagonists, it doesn't take too many risks by making large leaps of faith, and that's fine with me.

EZIO'S DOMI-NATIONS

The assassin-recruiting minigame enables you to control Templar-run cities by running missions there. You risk losing control, though, if you don't keep a regular presence in the territories.

Wise Warrior
Ezio is older, but he's battle-tested—and has many new weapons.

IF YOU PLAYED *ASSASSIN'S CREED BROTHERHOOD*, YOU'LL FEEL RIGHT AT HOME HERE

GAMEPLAY VARIETY

▲ *Revelations*'s multiplayer gives you many moments like this, but it's not frantic à la most FPS deathmatches.

▲ Altaïr's segments are less frequent, but fulfilling and challenging...and tie nicely into Ezio's storyline.

Ezio's journey dominates Story Mode, though he occasionally gets to play back a critical part of Altaïr's life. *Revelations*'s multiplayer builds on *Brotherhood*'s—team and free-for-all modes offer great pacing, and building your profile through experience is a strong incentive for repeat play.

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

ASSASSIN'S CREED REVELATIONS

INFO
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft (various studios)
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
November 15, 2011

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 8-player online

GENRE
Action-adventure

SUITABLE FOR
Anyone who played the previous games and wants closure

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ There's even more to do in this one!
- ❤ One story arc ends...but another will clearly continue
- ❤ Desmond's puzzle levels

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Den Defense didn't do it for me (you may disagree)
- ✖ Some control wonkiness

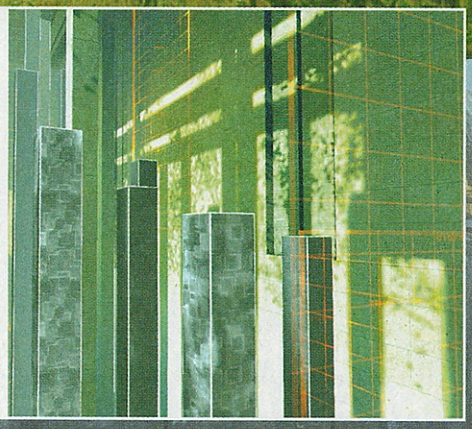
WIL SAYS:
Ubisoft keeps evolving the *Assassin's Creed* series—not broad leaps, but lots of little things to improve the gameplay.

OVERALL RATING:
4.5

@GAMER

PUZZLES GO ON FOR MILES...

Desmond Miles's story plays out in the Animus's "safe mode," after he ends up in a coma (from the events at the end of *Brotherhood*). Data fragments Ezio finds during his trek gradually unlock puzzle levels in the Animus for Desmond—well, you—to solve. They're futuristic brain teasers that give you different gameplay to work on: You have to use straight or sloped pieces to create a path, though you can only have a few active pieces at a time. Later, the environment messes with the pieces in frustrating ways.



▲ Getting into fights or reopening storefronts too fast will raise "Templar awareness"—which you can drop by bribing heralds.

A YEN FOR ZEN

Avoiding unnecessary conflicts

As with the assassin-recruiting minigame, gameplay in Ezio's story requires balance and constant attention. In *Brotherhood*, you took down Borgia captains and burned the nearby tower to capture a territory. In *Revelations*, you take down Templar leaders and burn the nearest tower to capture a territory...but if your subsequent actions are too aggressive, you might spark a Templar attack to reclaim the region. Den Defense is a tower-defense-style minigame where you place barriers and assassins to thwart the attack. Victory maintains your control of the territory; lose and you'll have to capture it again.

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: WAR IN THE NORTH

The *other* fellowship of the ring • Words: Chuck Osborn

Think you know everything that happened in *The Lord of the Rings* saga? Think again. Warner Bros. Interactive, the official video-game-license holder, hasn't finished exploring every nook and cranny of the epic tale yet. In this new action-RPG, you (and up to two buddies in co-op) play as a fellowship—not *the* Fellowship—consisting of a dwarven champion, elven loremaster, and human ranger who, it turns out, were crucial to the story by preventing Agandaur, Sauron's chief lieutenant, from conquering the northern realms. Think of them as Middle-earth's answer to Seal Team Six.

Designed as a co-op game, *War in the North* particularly shines with three players controlling each of the characters. The dwarf is a strong tank, the elf a magic user with weak melee attacks, and the human a competent melee and ranged fighter. Teamwork and strategy—such as having the elf set up a healing force-field bubble that deflects projectiles, while the ranger uses his ninja stealth powers to invisibly sneak up behind the enemies' most powerful member—can make short work of tough encounters. Solo players have a tougher time, as your AI companions don't always think strategically and can't be told what to do.

Combat is rated M for Massacre (heads and other assorted body parts can be cleaved with finishing moves) and ample loot (gold, weapons, armor) can be found and used to endlessly upgrade your characters. The most pleasantly unexpected part of the game comes in the depth of its writing and vocal performances. These provide ample background to the overall story, making *War in the North* a hack-n-slasher worth replaying.

MIDDLE-EARTH'S ANSWER TO SEAL TEAM SIX

▲ Farin swings a mean axe and can strengthen himself and others with a fearsome dwarven War Cry.

▲ Eradan the ranger's arrows alone won't bring down a boss; only strategy and cooperation will.

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: WAR IN THE NORTH

INFO
Publisher: Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment
Developer: Snowblind Studios
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
November 1, 2011

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 3-player co-op online; 2-player splitscreen local

GENRE
Action-RPG

SUITABLE FOR
LotR lore heads and anyone who needs a three-player co-op game

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Brilliantly fills in the missing gaps about the unexplored war in the north alluded to in the trilogy
- ❤ Three-player co-op playable throughout the campaign

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Can't direct AI companions
- ✖ Very linear level progression

ANDY SAYS:
I've never made it through the *Rings* books, but *War in the North*'s co-op grabbed me. Too bad it's not as good solo.

OVERALL RATING:

3.75

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: SKYWARD SWORD

A *different* tale of souls and swords, eternally retold

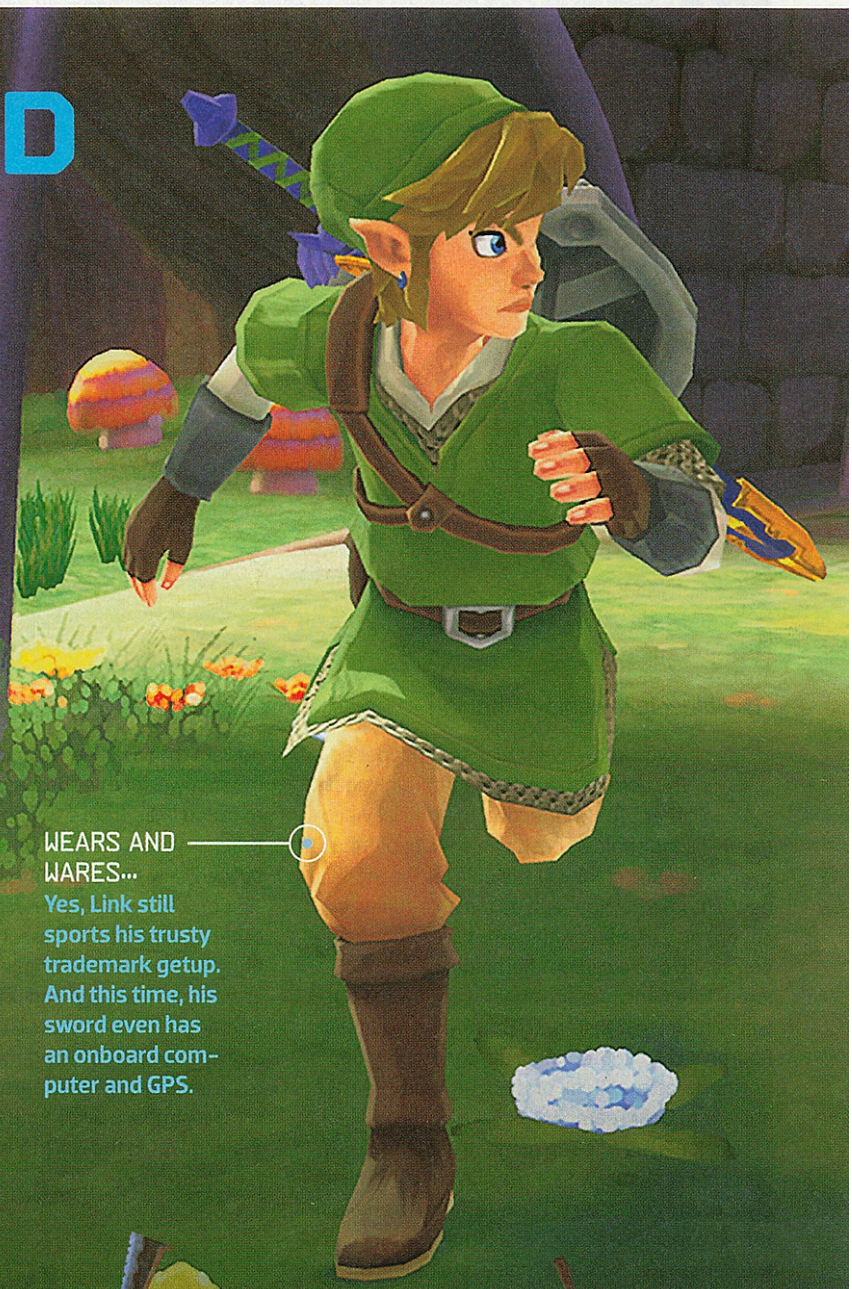
• Words: Ryan Scott

Back in 2006, Nintendo's jury-rigged launch-day Wii port of *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess*—a GameCube title masquerading as something it wasn't—soured me on the whole notion of a motion-controlled Zelda adventure. And while I went into *The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword* expecting a repeat performance, I feel confident in calling it anything but.

The latest outing for everyone's favorite silent-average-citizen-turned-reluctant-protagonist—that's "Link" for those of you who are default-name-challenged—kicks off in a floating fantasy city, where you participate in motion-controlled bird races and hear the obligatory whispers of ancient prophecies that you're soon right smack in the middle of. It's the supposed origin point of Nintendo's unknowable Zelda timeline; the titular sword is a familiar one (this time with a full computer-esque entity attached to it), and I'm sure we can all guess what evil lurks at the heart of it. Point is, *Skyward Sword* expertly rearranges the Zelda series's trusty rescue-the-girl trope toybox.

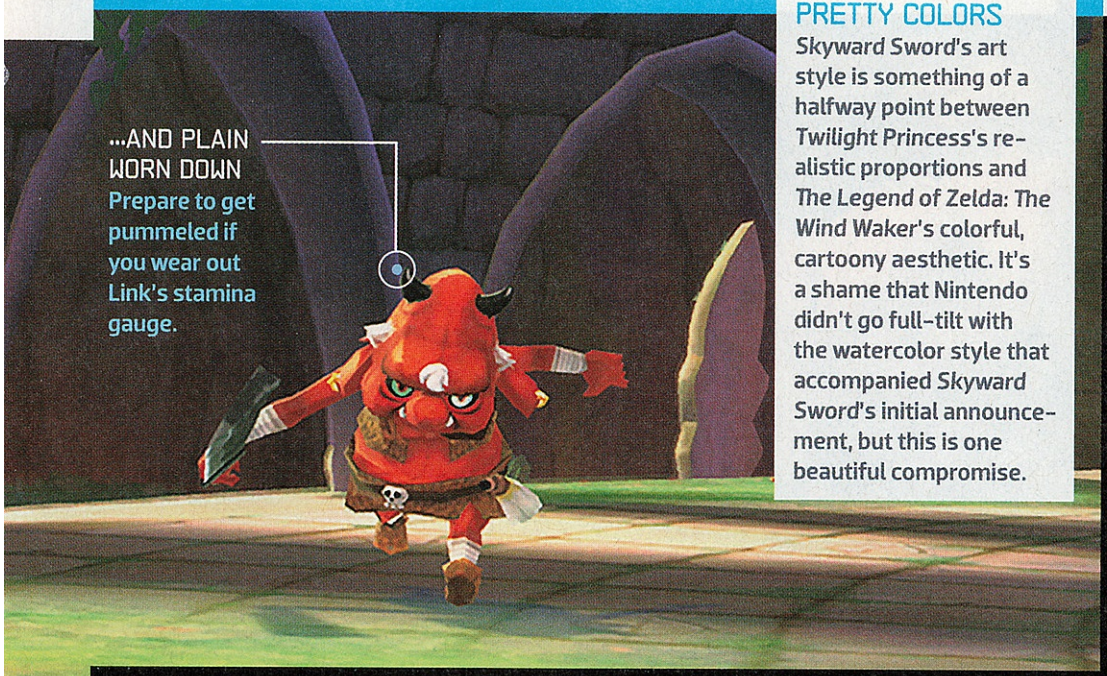
The big mechanical to-do here is *Skyward Sword*'s motion-controlled combat. If you've held out on buying the Wii MotionPlus peripheral, here's your justification to get one: Link's sword translates your Wii Remote-swinging arcs pretty much one for one. Whether you slice vertically, side-to-side, down the diagonal, or just thrust straight ahead, *Skyward Sword* matches your motions to the action. It's also endemic to winning fights and solving puzzles; whether you're horizontally mowing down a barricade of wooden posts or spinning your blade in circles to exhaust a motion-sensitive gatekeeper, the controls integrate into *Skyward Sword*'s challenges in interesting and successful ways.

The rest of Link's repertoire employs a few waggles as well...but the sword makes a fantastic showcase for nonstandard controls done right. It's worth disclosing that I'm the kind of grump who usually scoffs at anything that doesn't strictly involve analog sticks, D-pads, and buttons—but every now and then, something cool comes along to show us what could be...and, even better, puts a smile on the face of even the stauchest of grouches.



WEARS AND WARES...
Yes, Link still sports his trusty trademark getup. And this time, his sword even has an onboard computer and GPS.

MASTERING THE SWORD
Giant enemy groups can spell trouble, simply because you may have to resort to several quick, diverse swipes to dispatch everything. In a pinch, Link's trusty circular slash (whip the Wii Remote and Nunchuk outward simultaneously) can even the odds.



PRETTY COLORS

Skyward Sword's art style is something of a halfway point between *Twilight Princess*'s realistic proportions and *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker*'s colorful, cartoony aesthetic. It's a shame that Nintendo didn't go full-tilt with the watercolor style that accompanied *Skyward Sword*'s initial announcement, but this is one beautiful compromise.

LOONIES AND LOOT

▲ Remember what *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* taught us: Hyrule's serial smilers usually turn out to be nightmare-inducing lunatics.

▲ Expect the usual array of treasure chests strewn about the world, with all sorts of useful goodies for Link to loot.

01 LOCK AND LOAD
Wildly flailing about without using the lock-on camera won't take you far in this *Zelda* game.

02 FREAKING BATS
Some enemies require very specific sword-swinging motions to take down. Or you can just whip them to death.

03 WHIP IT GOOD
If you're not clear on what a whip motion entails... here you go. Keep that Remote strap nice and snug around your wrist!

04 INTERFACING
Yes, this giant user interface stays onscreen at all times. Fortunately, the non-Wii-challenged can turn it off.

Wii

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: SKYWARD SWORD

INFO
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Platforms: Wii
Reviewed on: Wii

RELEASE DATE
November 20, 2011

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
Action-adventure

SUITABLE FOR
Zelda fans, anyone who likes an entertaining fantasy adventure

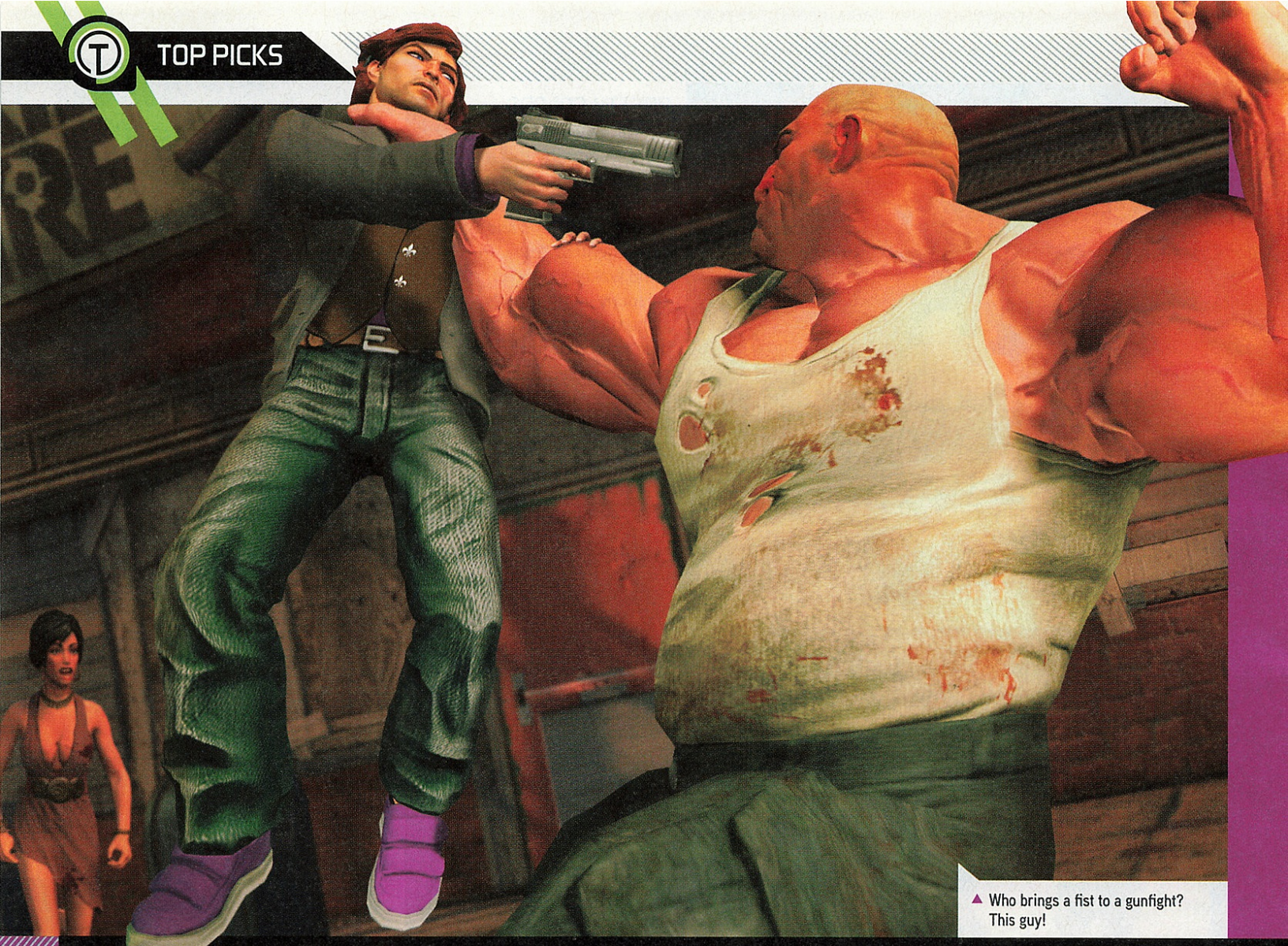
WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Extremely well-implemented motion controls
- ❤ Beautiful art style

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Some monsters are very unforgiving until you figure out their gimmick

ANDY SAYS:
Yes! Another big dose of Zelda goodness—and just when Wii owners could use a good reason to dust their systems off.

OVERALL RATING:

4.5



▲ Who brings a fist to a gunfight? This guy!

SAINTS ROW: THE THIRD

Volition takes bad taste to a glorious new level • Words: Will Tuttle

Saints Row: The Third might be the most unapologetically, unabashedly offensive videogame ever made. Unlike fellow paragons of digital filth—such as *Postal*—the third game in Volition's open-world crime saga never neglects good old-fashioned fun in its quest to shock and offend you. If anything, *The Third* is more focused on silly, over-the-top mayhem than anything else, offering up one of the most entertaining experiences of the year. Like summer blockbusters and junk food, *Saints Row: The Third* is proof positive that sometimes there's nothing better than stuff that's ostensibly bad for you.

It also flips the open-world genre on its head in one key way: Rather than starting as a bottom-feeding criminal and forcing the player to slowly make his (we'll stick with "his" here, as many female gamers will likely be turned off by the game's rampant misogyny and sexism) way up the proverbial food chain, the highly customizable lead character is already at the top of the Saints' rapidly expanding criminal empire. You know any game that gives you an airstrike and attack chopper within the first hour is going to be something special.

THE THIRD IS MORE FOCUSED ON SILLY, OVER-THE-TOP MAYHEM

The Third once again kicks off in Stilwater, but it isn't long before a botched bank robbery forces the Saints to set up shop in Steelport, a city controlled by The Syndicate, a shadowy organization made up of three distinctly different gangs. Steelport must be taken over district by district via a number of means, including protecting drug dealers during deliveries, wiping out large groups of enemy gangs, using attack choppers to keep your friends safe, or just generally causing as much mayhem as possible.

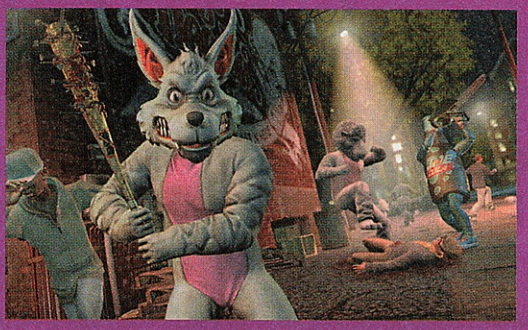
The previous games' respect system is also now woven through every aspect of the game, rewarding you for doing everything from driving on the wrong side of the road to destroying the most powerful enemy units. This system, combined with a ton of activity-based challenges, will keep any obsessive-compulsive gamer busy for dozens of hours.

Saints Row: The Third is not a perfect game, but it overcomes its mostly technical issues by creating a highly entertaining blend of varied action-RPG gameplay and offensively silly (I mean that in the best way) people and places.

▼ Daniel LaRusso has really let his freak flag fly since the last *Karate Kid* flick.

EVOLVING THE SERIES

Its name a play on *Gears of War*'s popular Horde Mode, *Saints Row: The Third*'s Whored Mode similarly requires survival (solo or cooperatively) amid wave after wave of enemies. However, Whored Mode also implements rules and themes on each level. One required me to take down a few dozen furries with just fists and a few grenades. Another tasked me to drop a bunch of 15-foot tall, scantily clad women using only a shotgun. It's an addictively fast blast of over-the-top carnage.



▲ *Saints Row: The Third* gives you plenty of new reasons to be afraid of the big bad wolf.

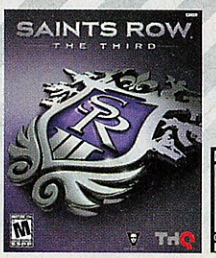
▲ Tank/car/chopper is the new rock/paper/scissors.

▲ Proof yet again that you can't take over a city without destroying a few gangs.

Masked Maniac
Meet the Luchadores, one of Steelport's three gangs.

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS



SAINTS ROW: THE THIRD

INFO
Publisher: THQ
Developer: Volition
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
November 15, 2011

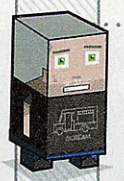
MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-player co-op online and local

GENRE
Action-adventure

SUITABLE FOR
Twisted sociopaths and miscreants, adrenaline junkies, and anyone waiting for *GTA5*

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Insanely over-the-top gameplay and characters
- ❤ Tons of customization options and content
- ❤ Co-op free-for-all and Whored Mode are silly fun

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Those with delicate sensibilities *will* be offended
- ✖ Story jumps around



ANDY SAYS:
Saints Row: The Third puts myriad risque—and hysterical—characters and items in your face. You have been warned...

OVERALL RATING:

4.25

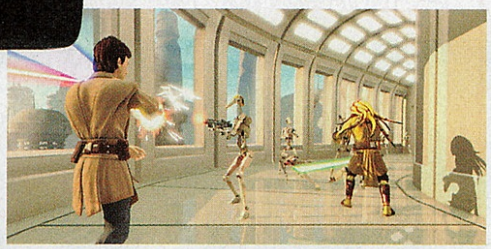
Kinect in ways you've never imagined!

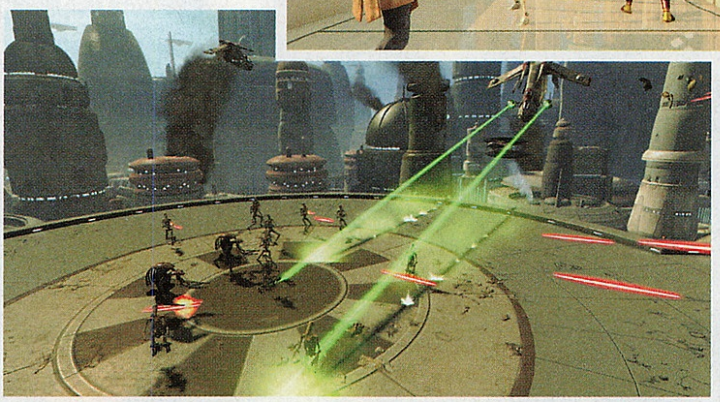
The Kinect features a fast-growing collection of imaginative and physical ways for you, your family, and friends to experience truly interactive entertainment.

Kinect™: Disneyland® Adventures

Harnessing the controller-free magic of Kinect, *Kinect: Disneyland Adventures* allows children, families, and Disney fans of all ages to explore California's famed *Disneyland* theme park, step into adventures based on attractions, engage in challenging quests, and interact with beloved Disney characters using their full bodies and voices—no controller required.

© Disney. © Disney Pixar





Kinect Star Wars

Stunning visuals transport you into the *Star Wars* universe, complete with your favorite characters, vehicles, ships, droids, and much more. Drawing on iconic moments from the motion pictures, *Kinect Star Wars* enables you to enter the *Star Wars* universe and experience a wide variety of physical play. Wield a lightsaber and train to be a Jedi Master, become a champion pod racer, master the Force, pilot Imperial and Rebellion ships, race speeder bikes, and much more. Share the Force with friends through co-op, competitive, and duel modes.

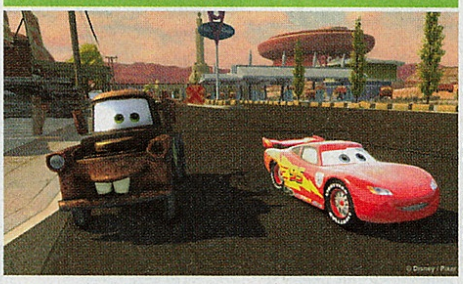
Sesame Street: Once Upon a Monster

Players join favorite Sesame Street characters Elmo, Cookie Monster, Oscar, Grover, and all-new characters as they discover a long-lost children's book titled *Once Upon a Monster*. As they read, they join the action to become part of a living storybook adventure, helping new monster friends with their problems by exploring the book chapter by chapter, page by page. It features co-op action that is specially designed for sibling and/or parent-child co-play; and teaches social, emotional, and other important life lessons through its colorful and whimsical gameplay. Every activity is designed to be fun played solo, but even more fun with a family member or friend.

Kinectimals™ Now with Bears

This warm and fuzzy title invites children, their parents, and animal lovers of all ages to build lasting friendships with some of the world's most exotic creatures. Just like real pets, your *Kinectimals Now with Bears* cubs and bears will come running when they hear your voice; respond to commands such as "jump," "roll over" and "play dead"; and purr with joy when you scratch them behind their ears. You will embark on two journeys across mysterious islands and build a heartwarming bond with your feline and bear cubs while exploring the islands' many secrets. Along the way, you and your pets will discover hidden treasure, ancient ruins, unexplored caves, and a land frozen in ice. Bring your cub with you anywhere with the Kinectimals mobile app.

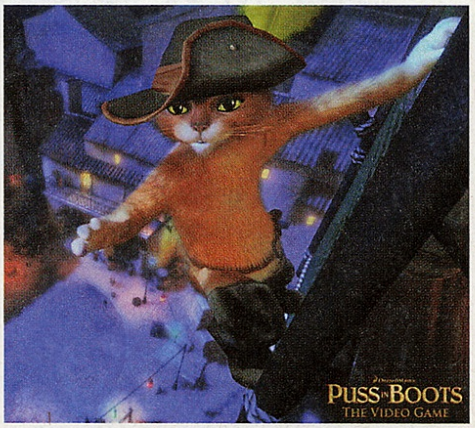
COMING IN SPRING 2012



© Disney. © Disney Pixar

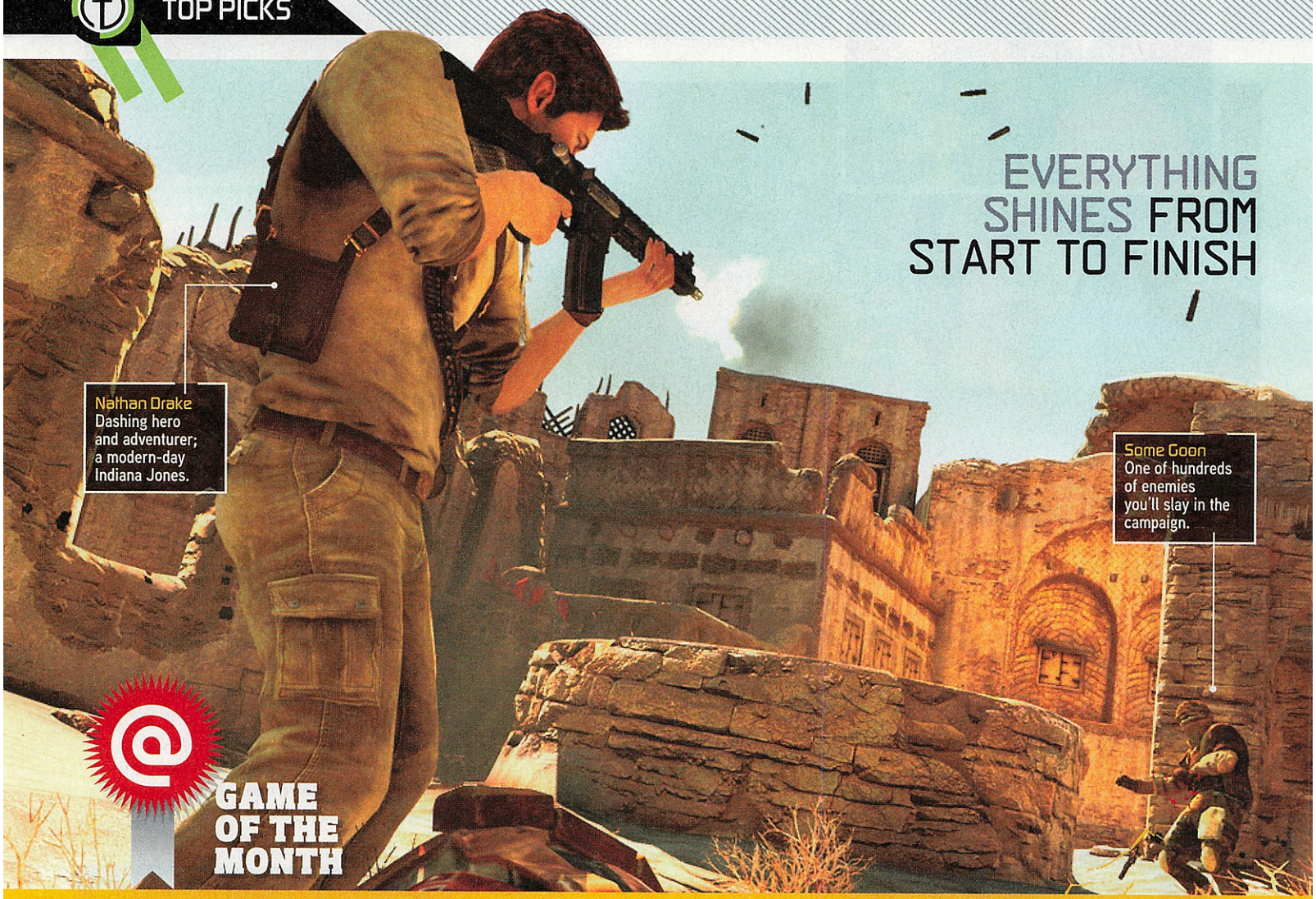
Rush (code name)

For the first time in Kinect history, you and your favorite Disney Pixar character can interact onscreen and play cooperatively to help solve challenges. Use your voice and body to seamlessly move from fast-paced puzzle-solving to moments of pulse-pounding agility and speed. *Rush* is an exciting racing adventure game that invites families and fans of all ages to experience the worlds of five beloved Disney Pixar films: *The Incredibles*, *Ratatouille*, *Up*, *Cars 2*, and *Toy Story 3*. Race against time and solve time-based challenges without ever leaving the living room.



Puss in Boots

Step into legendary boots and take up his trusty sword in this all-new swashbuckling adventure that delves into the thrilling origin story of the feline hero himself. On this daring journey, players must utilize Puss's feline sneaking abilities, explore highly interactive environments, and engage in real-time swordplay against an array of fiendish foes. With the game's motion-based sword fighting element, players must swing, kick, block, and unleash special attacks such as Puss's "Claw Frenzy." True to his nature, though, Puss will always find time to serenade a señorita or two with his guitar.



GAME OF THE MONTH

UNCHARTED 3: DRAKE'S DECEPTION

No deception: It's one of the best PlayStation 3 games to date

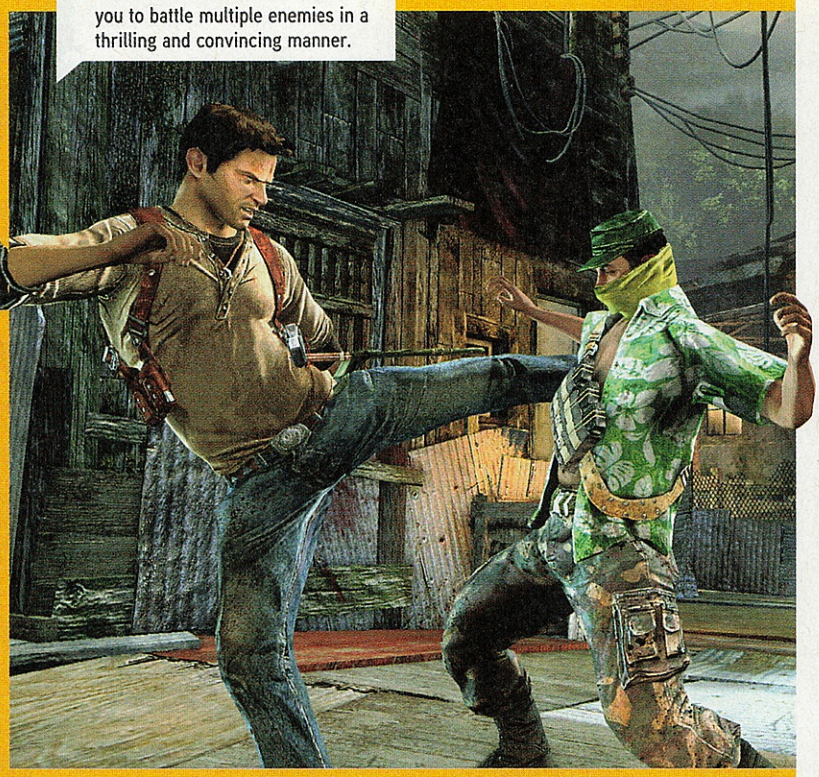
• Words: Andrew Hayward

Within 10 minutes of starting the campaign, I could tell that *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception* was exceptional. Compared to the previous game's gasp-inducing opening, which found Nathan Drake dangling from a train car over an arctic cliff, a London barroom brawl might seem mundane. But the fluid hand-to-hand combat wowed me from the first goon sent crashing through a table, and the bathroom showdown against a large thug proved one of the most intimidating fights I had ever faced in a game. And that's before you even really know what's happening!

In sum, the campaign offers several hours of adventure, and while not quite as thrill-a-minute as predecessor *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves*, the push towards more nuanced storytelling makes for a supremely effective single-player experience. *Drake's Deception* digs deeper into the hero's origins, but what really stands out here are the character interactions, whether it's the antics of Drake and his mentor, Sully—easily the richest and most convincing relationship in gaming—or the performances of ancillary allies. Everything shines from start to finish, from the convincing animations to the immensely detailed backdrops, proving Naughty Dog's impeccable skill.

But the quieter moments still come secondary to the intense action sequences, which thrust Drake into death-defying scenarios, such as blasting enemies from behind moving cover on a cargo plane or escaping upwards through a burning mansion. It feels like a series of small catastrophes unfolding upon themselves at all times, and between the improved melee combat, constant gunplay, and acrobatic climbing segments, the campaign maintains a fever pitch. Rare frustrating encounters are easily forgotten in the wake of how nearly perfect the execution is everywhere else.

Paired with slick online multiplayer and co-op (see sidebars), *Uncharted 3* offers up a remarkable master class on cinematic entertainment that not only sets a sizzling new benchmark for action titles, but is also one of the finest games of this generation, regardless of genre or platform.



▼ Enhanced melee combat enables you to battle multiple enemies in a thrilling and convincing manner.

MULTIPLAYER MADNESS \\

Online multiplayer debuted in *Uncharted* 2, and it's back in *Drake's Deception* with new modes and features in tow. Beyond team-centric deathmatch and objective-based modes, *Uncharted 3* also has free-for-all matches, as well as special "Kickback" perks and "Power Play" scenarios (to aid losing teams). Speedy movement and firearm action give *Uncharted* a strikingly different feel, and the enhancements make for a longer-lasting, more satisfying online experience.

▲ Drake's quest ultimately takes him through the desert—a series first that yields surprising results.

▲ Gunplay remains a key part of the *Uncharted* experience, with pistols, machine guns, and more at hand.

▲ Stealth tactics are important, whether you're sneaking up on a foe or quietly attacking from above.

CAN'T STOP CO-OP \\

While the *Uncharted 3* campaign is strictly a solo experience (despite frequent AI allies), Naughty Dog retooled some of the stages for standalone Co-op Adventure missions, which can be played online with three players or in local splitscreen for two. The five missions offer entertaining asides and tense combat scenarios, with one location each borrowed from *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune* and *Uncharted 2*.

PS3

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

UNCHARTED 3: DRAKE'S DECEPTION

INFO
Publisher: Sony
Developer: Naughty Dog
Platforms: PS3

RELEASE DATE
November 1, 2011

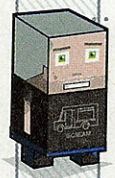
MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 10 players competitive online; up to 3 players co-op online; 2-player co-op splitscreen local

GENRE
Action

SUITABLE FOR
All PlayStation 3 owners who enjoy videogames

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Fantastic campaign delivers intense moments and stellar storytelling
- ❤ Arguably the best-looking PlayStation 3 game to date—it's gorgeous!

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Occasional campaign bottlenecks with overwhelming enemies



ANDY SAYS:
Naughty Dog has taken the *Uncharted* series's cinematic gameplay to new heights in this third installment. So much fun!

OVERALL RATING:

5

PS3 XBOX 360 Wii

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

DISNEY UNIVERSE

INFO
Publisher: Disney Interactive Studios
Developer: Eurocom
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, Wii
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
October 25, 2011

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 4-player online or local

GENRE
Action-adventure

SUITABLE FOR
Young Disney-lovers; staunch fans of the LEGO videogames

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Cute Disney-themed stage design
- ❤ Incentivizes multiple playthroughs for collection-crazy players

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Not much of a challenge
- ✖ Fairly mindless gameplay

WIL SAYS:
You don't always know what you'll get when "Disney" is in a game's name. *Disney Universe* is solid and clean...but simple.

OVERALL RATING:

3

DISNEY UNIVERSE

The House of Mouse steals a slice of the LEGO pie • Words: Ryan Scott

Often, it's apt to equate the typical videogame with a theme park: In the best-case scenario, both present lavish and meticulously guided experiences. You see something cool, flail about excitedly for a bit, and move on to the next attraction. That's a pretty literal description of *Disney Universe*, which one might sum up as "Like Traveller's Tales's *LEGO* videogames, but with Disney stuff."

Like those games, *Disney Universe* breaks down into a half-dozen distinct worlds—each modeled after Disney/Pixar properties, such as *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *Alice in Wonderland* (the polarizing Tim Burton version), and *WALL-E*—and you're tasked with solving simple puzzles and collecting copious Mickey Mouse-shaped doodads while whomping rogue robots who've seized what amounts to a futuristic VR-powered Disneyland theme park.

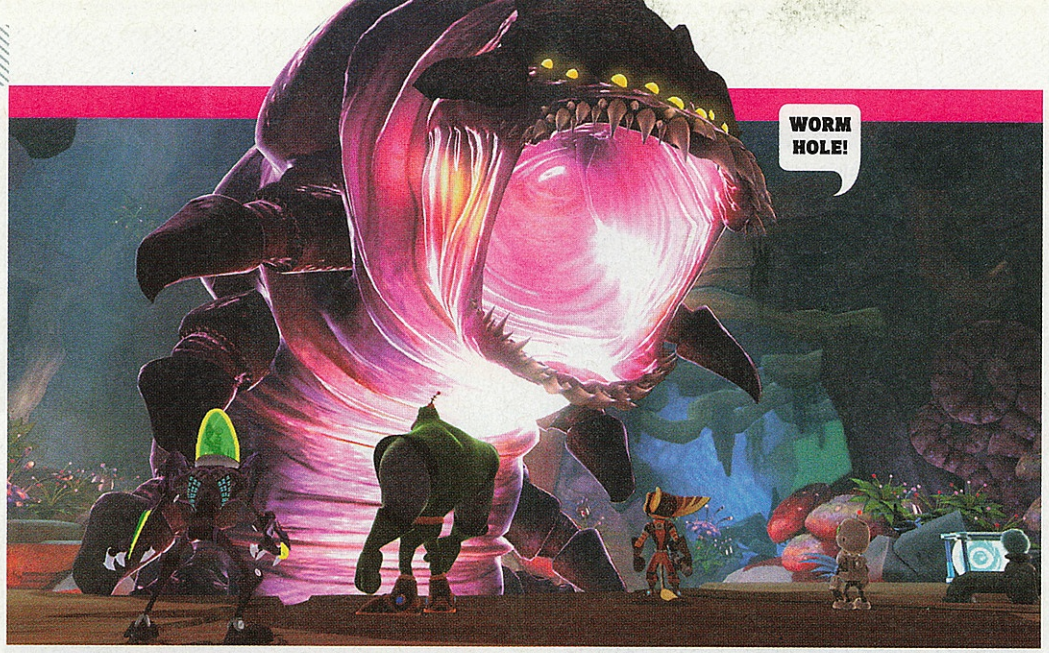
The trouble is, *Disney Universe*'s puzzles almost always consist of carrying an object from Point A to Point B...and this carrying is interspersed with regular robo-incursions. After you've button-mashed for a bit, it's back to dragging and dropping until an exit pops up. Some areas switch things up with anti-gravity action or simple aiming exercises, but—even if you disable the big, glowing hint arrow—nothing in *Disney Universe* poses an honest challenge for anyone but the youngest gamers. In that regard, it's got nothing on the aforementioned *LEGO* games.

Not that I expect to be terribly challenged by a game clearly intended for children, but it's worth pointing out that kids aren't dumb; hand an eight-year-old a copy of *Super Mario Galaxy* and it'll almost certainly get figured out. *Disney Universe* gets fun enough when multiple players jump in—at that point, it turns into social chaos, with friends tossing each other about or chiding one another for stealing precious upgrade items—but overall, it's a mostly mindless button-masher with some pretty things to look at. It might keep an easily satisfied tyke enthralled for a weekend, or give gaming parents a chance to play alongside their young ones, but I promise you: Your kids are probably smarter than you think. ◙

▲ The more, the merrier: Bringing a trio of friends ups the enjoyment potential—and, of course, the chaos.

WAG ON, WAG OFF

Given *Disney Universe*'s intended audience, the Wii version should be a popular purchase—and, as with most Wii ports, it's got its share of differences. As you'd expect, its visuals don't look nearly as clean as those of its big brothers. The bigger question lies with the controls, and the easy answer for the motion-control-averse is, there's no shaking required: As long as you can deal with a Wiimote in one hand and a Nunchuk in the other, you're good to go.



RATCHET & CLANK: ALL 4 ONE

Intergalactic avengers, assemble!

• Words: Ryan Scott

Scores of gamers might cite Nintendo's *Super Mario* franchise as the gold standard in 3D platforming; I'll take *Ratchet & Clank* over *Mario* any day. Even now, on its tenth installment (in as many years), the *Ratchet* series doesn't coast for a nanosecond. Bravo to developer Insomniac Games for keeping its lovable sci-fi duo a cut above similar critters-and-collectibles action games—and bravo, again, for taking some interesting risks with *Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One*.

The big, bold bullet point this time around: four-player drop-in co-op action. You get your pick of Ratchet, Clank, publicity-obsessed "superhero" Captain Quark, and former-archvillain-turned-highly-reluctant-ally Doctor Nefarious—who all play more-or-less the same, with equal access to *All 4 One*'s colorful arsenal (and one unique weapon apiece for individuality). Each lengthy (and extremely linear) level is constructed with cooperation in mind; door switches take two to operate, team-seeking grapple lines insure against death-by-bottomless-pit, and still-standing partners can resuscitate fallen friends. Even in single-player mode, an AI partner (and occasional liability) always accompanies you. In practice, co-op is as fun and chaotic as any mode in this series ought to be, and competing with friends for precious currency keeps you on your toes.

Sure, the lack of both doubled-up co-op characters and shared experience/equipment pools (every character you play starts from scratch) creates some logistical annoyance. And scope-wise, *All 4 One* isn't quite as grand as the typical *Ratchet & Clank* game. But even if you go it alone, it's time well-spent.

KNOW YOUR HERO: CAPTAIN QWARK

Equal parts cowardly and self-centered, Captain Qwark has been driving Ratchet and Clank nuts since their debut. He takes credit for exaggerated or false heroic deeds, he's abundantly and transparently gutless, and he has a reputation among Ratchet's rogues' gallery as an easily duped patsy. If Ratchet and Clank have a problem to solve, Qwark probably had a hand (directly or indirectly) in causing it.

Team Effort
Here, the group is working together nicely. It's not always so orderly.

PS3

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

RATCHET & CLANK: ALL 4 ONE

INFO
Publisher: SCEA
Developer: Insomniac Games
Platforms: PS3

RELEASE DATE
October 18, 2011

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 4-player online or local

GENRE
Platformer

SUITABLE FOR
Anyone who likes a good single-player or co-op action game

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Fun four-player co-op
- ❤ Still looks one step shy of a Pixar film

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Non-shared resources mean you're somewhat committed to one character
- ✖ Occasionally brain-dead AI co-op partners

ANDY SAYS:
Co-op is a scream. The action alternates between helpful and slapstick hilarity—like a four-person *Three Stooges* routine.

OVERALL RATING:

4

PS3 XBOX 360 Wii 3DS

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

SPIDER-MAN: EDGE OF TIME

INFO
Publisher: Activision
Developer: Beenox
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, 3DS
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
October 4, 2011

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
Action

SUITABLE FOR
Friendly neighborhood web-slingers of the past, present, and future

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Great story by Peter David
- ❤ Packed with extra content

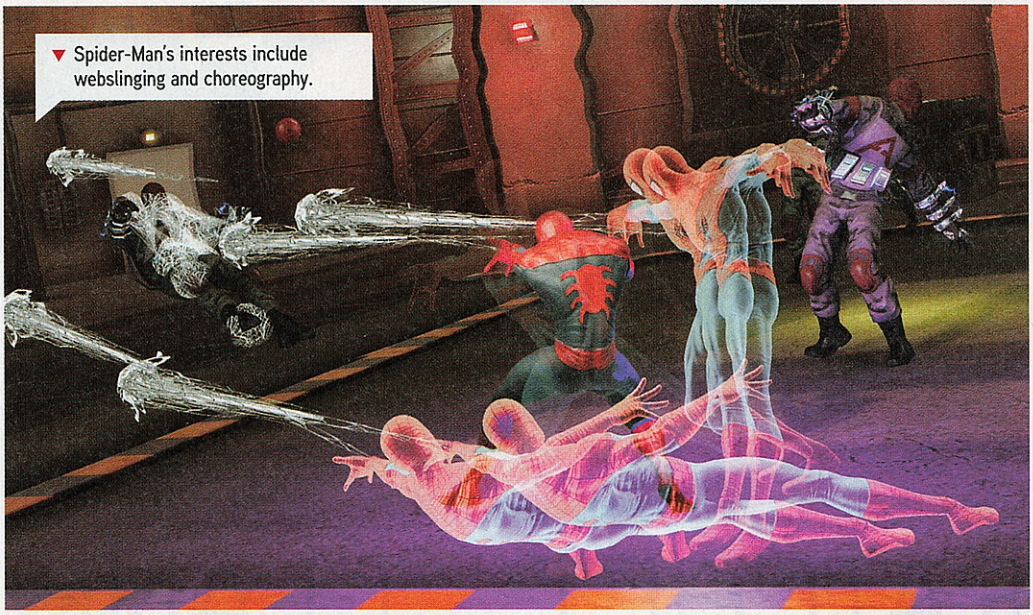
WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Game feels claustrophobic at times
- ✖ Minor targeting issues

WIL SAYS:
I do wish there was a *Spider-Man* game that was *great*, but I guess we have to settle for *good enough*.

OVERALL RATING:

4

Gamer



▼ Spider-Man's interests include webslinging and choreography.

SPIDER-MAN: EDGE OF TIME

Time is running out for your friendly neighborhood Spider-Men • Words: David Chapman

Last year, developer Beenox gave comic-book fans a wild, multiverse-spanning, web-slinging adventure with not just one, but four different wall crawlers in *Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions*. For its sophomore release, Beenox has put together a new time-travelling Marvel Team-Up starring the Spider-Man of today and his high-tech counterpart from the year 2099.

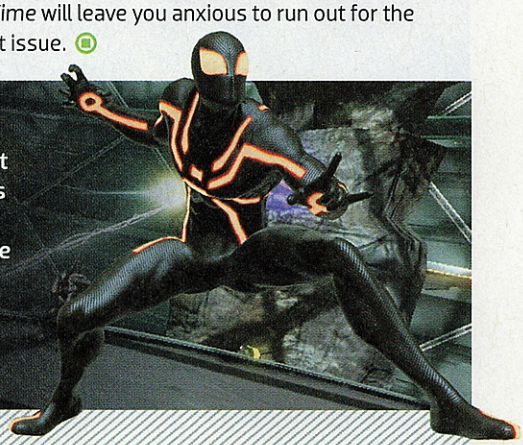
If there's one thing I've learned from science fiction, it's that tinkering with time is generally a bad idea. So, when an evil scientist from the future travels back in time to rewrite history and wipe a certain webhead from the archives, it's up to both eras' Spider-Men (Spider-Mans?) to work together from their respective timelines and restore things back to the status quo. As confusing as the plot may sound, it actually all comes together nicely, thanks in no small part to the involvement of legendary comic-book scribe (and original *Spider-Man 2099* writer) Peter David.

As great as the story in *Edge of Time* is, there are still a couple of things about the gameplay that makes my spider-sense tingle. Because the whole story takes place within the Alchemax skyscraper, the game feels a bit claustrophobic at times. When fighting enemy groups, there's not a lot of room to breathe. And since web swinging isn't exactly an indoor sport, movement—particularly web zips—can go a bit "buggy." It's not too bad in regular gameplay, but it can be downright frustrating when racing the clock in some of the timed challenges.

Despite a couple of weak threads, *Spider-Man: Edge of Time* still has plenty to lure comic fans into its web. A great story, repeatable challenges, and a host of unlockable content offer plenty of lasting appeal. It's about as close as you'll get to playing an actual *Spider-Man* comic book. And like many of the best comics, wrapping up *Edge of Time* will leave you anxious to run out for the next issue.

SPINNING NEW THREADS

Spider-Man may have an iconic look, but that doesn't mean he's not a bit of a fashionista. *Edge of Time* has raided Spidey's wardrobe for more than twenty different unlockable costumes. Players who have a save file from *Shattered Dimensions* will automatically unlock eight new costumes, while gamers who pick up the game from Best Buy will get early access to Spider-Man's slick "Big Time" costume.



RAYMAN ORIGINS

Spiked fish like this are the piranha of the videogame world.

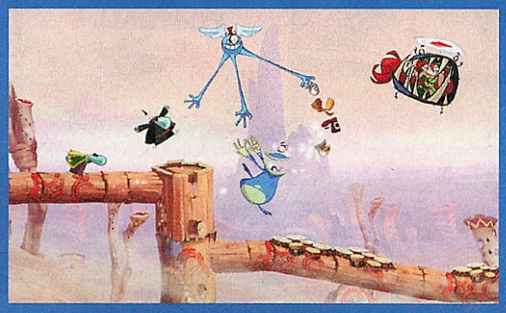
No arms, no legs, but Rayman still gets service • Words: David Chapman

This might be hard for younger gamers to believe, but there was once a time when Rayman was more than just a cameo character in the *Raving Rabbids* series. In fact, the limbless hero was once Ubisoft's lead mascot before disappearing in the shadow of those loony lapins. In Origins, Rayman takes center stage once again, returning to his 2D platforming roots...and he wants you to invite a few friends to the show.

The story begins with Rayman and his buddies relaxing in the Glade of Dreams, where their slacking ways raise the ire of the Darktoon minions from the underworld. It doesn't take long for the baddies to take control. Making matters worse, the Bubble Dreamer, the deity responsible for dreaming up the entire world, has gone a little bonkers, leaving Rayman and his friends as the only ones able to set things right.

Ubisoft took a big risk in turning back the clock on the Rayman franchise, and it paid off big. Visually, *Rayman Origins* is a tasty bit of eye candy. It's like actually playing a Saturday morning cartoon. Plus, thanks to the local multiplayer support for up to four players, it's perfect for when friends and family gather around the couch for a good ol' fashioned game night. My only real gripe is that *Rayman Origins* is better with friends, but the lack of online play means you're going to have to get everyone in one place to get the most out of the experience.

Sorry, Mario, but *Rayman Origins* is, hands down, the most entertaining platformer you'll find on the current generation of consoles. It's good to see the Rayman cast back together again, and with any luck, this is just the first stop on a strong comeback tour.



▲ Betilla the Fairy and her sisters fill the damsel-in-distress role, giving our heroes an extra spring in their step.

▲ If your world is created from someone's dreams, you might want to avoid that *Pirates* triple feature.

PS3 XBOX 360 Wii 3DS PS VITA

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

RAYMAN ORIGINS

INFO
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Montpellier
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, 3DS, PS Vita
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
November 15, 2011
(PS Vita in 2012)

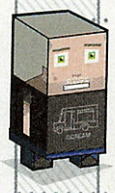
MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 4-player local

GENRE
Action-platformer

SUITABLE FOR
Retro platform-hoppers who are tired of inviting plumbers to all of their parties

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Gorgeous Saturday morning-style animations
- ❤ Simple, smooth controls
- ❤ A blast to play with others

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Lack of online limits multiplayer options
- ✖ Playing alone isn't quite as fulfilling



ANDY SAYS:
Playing solo is fun, but it's much better when you co-op with friends. Just don't expect everything to be "cooperative."

OVERALL RATING:

4.5

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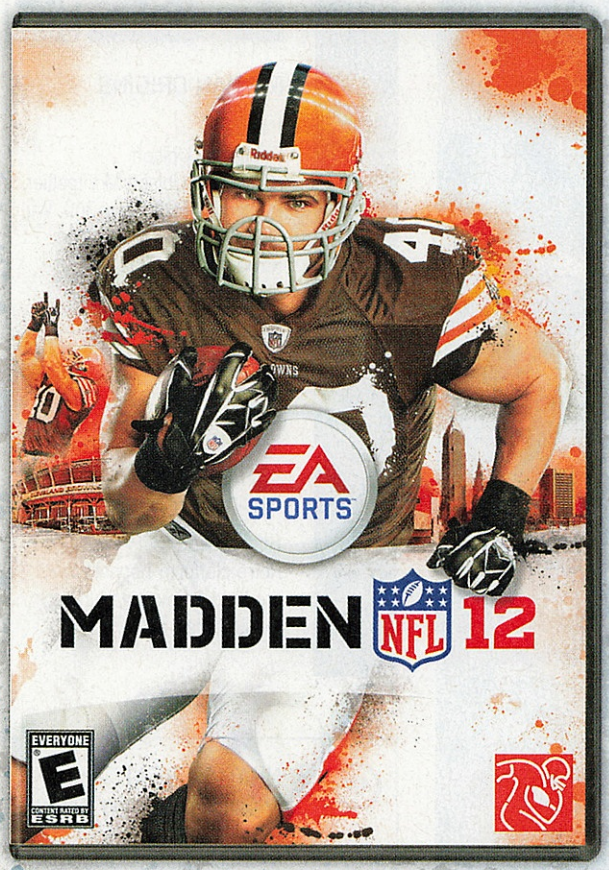

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EVERYONE to EVERYONE 10+ ™

E-E 10+ Mild Violence

ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

Mini Reviews:

CHECK THESE SHORTIES!

Of course, size doesn't matter. These games are more than worth your attention.

▼ Sand and stock cars: not BFFs.

▼ I love the smell of falling leaves and burning engines in the fall.

NASCAR UNLEASHED

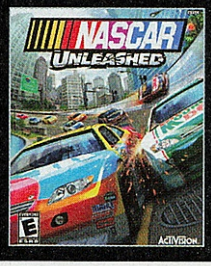
EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: Activision • Developer: Firebrand Games • Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, 3DS • Words: Timothy J. Seppala

Don't write off *Nascar Unleashed* as another budget racer—it's surprisingly good. Its three- and four-lap races keep the pace fast and tight, complementing the arcadey package. Race cars feel more like bumper cars with sponsor paint jobs than Sunday circle burners, but that's the reason *Unleashed* succeeds: It's pure *fun*. Cars turn on a dime and moving from 20th place to 1st is usually one speed-boost away.

Simply crossing the finish line isn't enough, though. Each career race has primary goals—shunt X opponents, drift around Y corners—as well as dynamic objectives; completing them to earn another nitrous burst kept me interested, even when I safely led in first place.

You don't need to be a Nascar junkie to like *Unleashed*. In fact, it's probably better if you aren't: Drifting, a 20-car field, and the massive amount of right turns might turn you off. But, everyone else? Sit back and enjoy the ride.



MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-player splitscreen
GENRE Racing
RELEASE DATE
November 1, 2011
SUITABLE FOR
Non-Nascar followers, arcade aficionados

OVERALL RATING:

3.5

SONIC GENERATIONS

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: Sega • Developer: Sonic Team • Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360 • Words: Heidi Kemps

Sonic has had ups and downs over his 25-year career, so the aim of *Sonic Generations* is to combine the best of both old-school 2D *Sonics* and the more recent 3D outings. It succeeds in some ways—many redone levels look fantastic, and the way familiar 3D stages are redone in 2D for "classic" Sonic is often very clever. Several control and stage-design improvements from last year's *Sonic Colors* are also evident. There are still frustrating elements, though: Missing targeted jumps as "modern" Sonic is much too easy, and the framerate occasionally drops when a lot is happening onscreen. And while the game offers some charming nostalgia, it feels as though it relies on fond memories as a crutch a little too often. It's better than most of Sonic's more recent efforts and oftentimes quite fun, but in comparison to last year's superb *Sonic Colors*, this time-travelling trip feels rather muted.

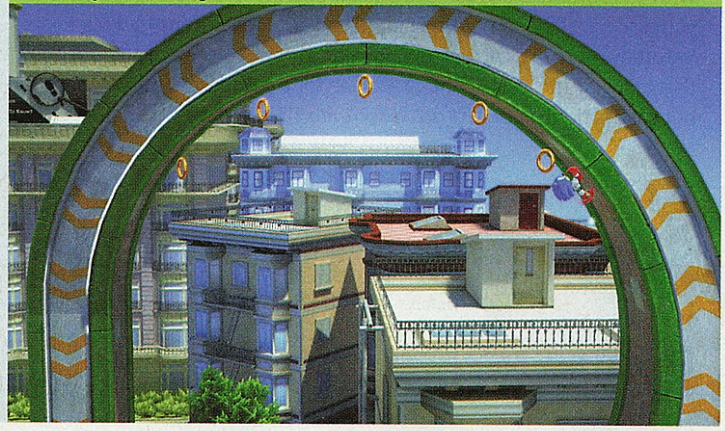
MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only
GENRE Action
RELEASE DATE
November 1, 2011
SUITABLE FOR
Faithful franchise followers through thick and thin

OVERALL RATING:

3.25

▼ Some may consider Sonic's downhill ride here an apt metaphor...

▼ ...along with running in circles.



No, your gracious hosts are not going to turn on the air conditioning.

The economy isn't why attendance is down at the Transylvania County Fair.

HOUSE OF THE DEAD: OVERKILL—EXTENDED CUT

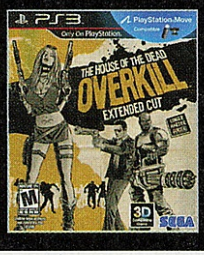
MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: Sega • Developer: Headstrong Games • Platforms: PS3 • Words: Matt Cabral

M-rated *House of the Dead: Overkill* was a bit lost on a Wii audience more accustomed to cooking with Mama. Re-issued with added content (and gore), the zombie-killing shooter is more at home on the PS3.

In addition to the original co-op campaign, this director's cut-like edition adds two extra levels, new weapons, 3D, and Move support, as well as a fresh coat of HD paint. The real draw, though, is the opportunity to unload face-ventilating hand-cannons into all manner of flesh-craving creeps.

Complemented by a grindhouse-inspired presentation, the arcadey action pits you against enemies running the gamut from crazed carnies to southern-fried psychos. It's guilty-pleasure gaming that doesn't evolve the genre, but it's hard to deny the appeal of introducing a pole-dancing zombie stripper to a face full of buckshot.



MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-player local for campaign; 4-player co-op for mini-games
GENRE Light-gun shooter
RELEASE DATE
October 25, 2011
SUITABLE FOR
Zombie giblet aficionados

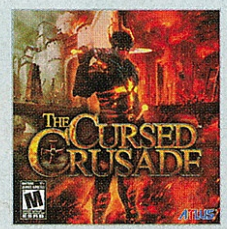
OVERALL RATING: 3.75

THE CURSED CRUSADE

MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: Atlus • Developer: Kylotonn Games • Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC • Words: Jordan Baughman

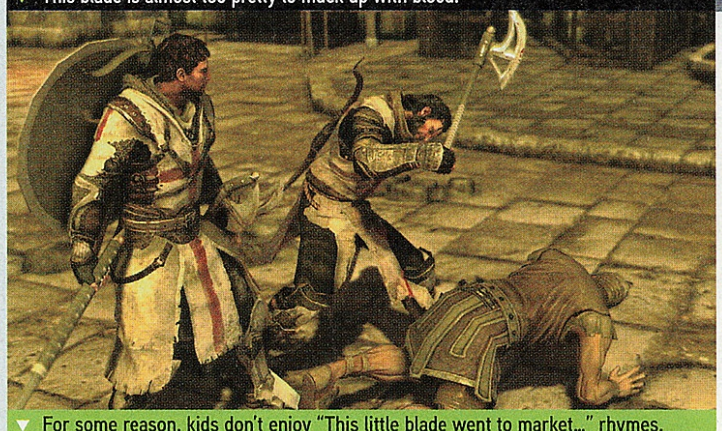
The story behind *The Cursed Crusade* won't be what hooks you. Nor will you find yourself especially engaged by either of the game's protagonists—the Knight Templar Denz and the Spanish brigand Esteban (the amateur-hour voice acting will make sure of that). No, what's going to keep you coming back to this budget title is the surprisingly solid melee combat and incredibly fun co-op gameplay. With each brutal execution you pull off and every new weapon style you discover, it becomes easier and easier to forgive the game's Saturday morning-cartoon dialogue and the cavalcade of cut-scenes that last way too long. If you're looking for a competent beat-em-up but cash is tight, you can't go wrong with *The Cursed Crusade*.



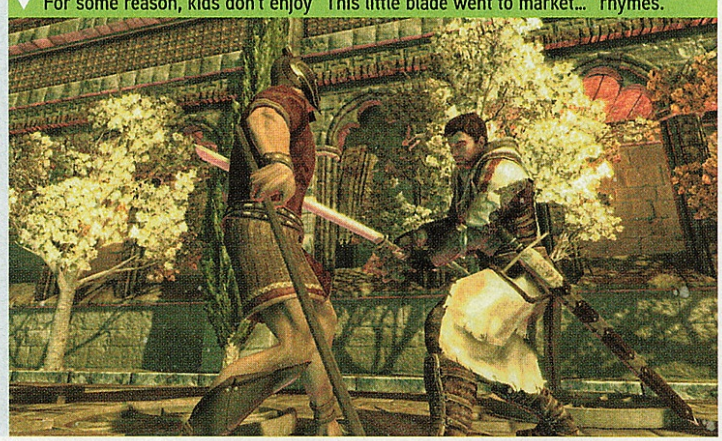
MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-player co-op online or local
GENRE Action-adventure
RELEASE DATE
October 25, 2011
SUITABLE FOR
Beat-em-up fans who are on a tight budget

OVERALL RATING: 2.75

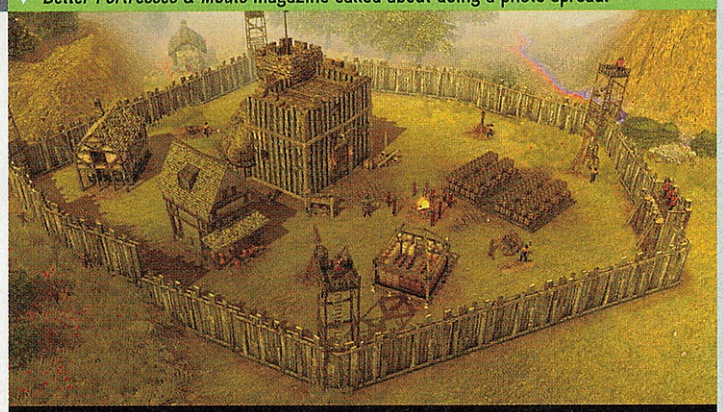
This blade is almost too pretty to muck up with blood.



For some reason, kids don't enjoy "This little blade went to market..." rhymes.



▼ *Better Fortresses & Moats* magazine called about doing a photo spread.



▼ It certainly looks like wood is a plentiful resource in this area.

STRONGHOLD 3

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: SouthPeak Games • Developer: Firefly Studios • Platforms: PC • Words: Jordan Baughman

This sequel may very well become a point of contention among RTS purists. Unlike most modern RTS titles that focus primarily on all-out war, the *Stronghold* series maintains an "everything and the kitchen sink" approach, where you lead a massive military campaign while simultaneously improving the lives of a bunch of whiny peasants through scrupulous city management.

Series fans will be disappointed to find that *Stronghold 3* does nothing to change up its formula. Newcomers will be disappointed simply because they bought a buggy game. While meticulously crafting your own perfect medieval society can be satisfying in its own way, the game crashes quite often, poor unit pathing makes directing your troops a nightmare, and the game is absolutely rife with obnoxious difficulty spikes. Until the game is patched, only the most stalwart of knights should attempt braving these lands.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
4-player competitive online
GENRE Real-time strategy
RELEASE DATE
October 25, 2011
SUITABLE FOR
Compulsive micromanagers with time on their hands

OVERALL RATING:

2.5

MIGHT AND MAGIC HEROES VI

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: Ubisoft • Developer: Black Hole Entertainment • Platforms: PC • Words: Ryan Scott

Heroes of Might & Magic is the closest thing the turn-based strategy genre has to an ambassador, and though *Might & Magic Heroes VI* shifts some words around, it's no worse for wear. The (extremely) lengthy campaign frames itself around map exploration quests, city-conquering (and -defense) crusades, and pitched battles. Turns equal weeks—and weeks equal more monsters to brawl with.

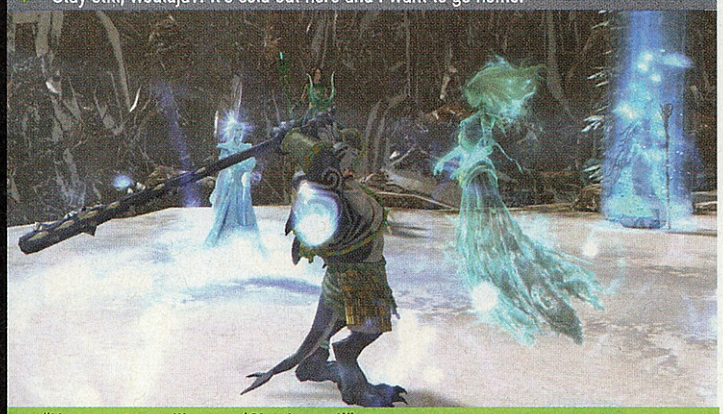
You can micromanage your economy and army, but combat headlines everything: Stationary heroes bequeath buffs to lesser units, while footmen and archers deliver beatdowns. Combat can devolve into a dull war of attrition; max out your unit speed, bang on each other until someone's dead, and hope it's more tactical next time. Luckily, the good moments outshine the less-so.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 8-player online
GENRE Turn-based strategy
RELEASE DATE
October 13, 2011
SUITABLE FOR
Hardcore strategists

OVERALL RATING:

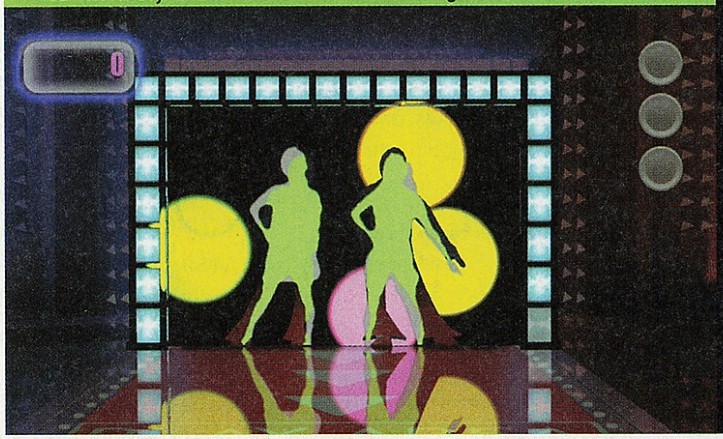
3.5

▼ "Stay still, wouldja?! It's cold out here and I want to go home."



▼ "No, no...stop yelling out 'Checkmate!'"

Not shown: myriad real-life contortions in front of the Kinect.



You'll never say "I don't know where I fit in" ever again.

HOLE IN THE WALL: DELUXE EDITION

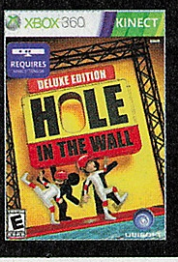
EVERYONE
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: Ubisoft • Developer: Ubisoft •
Platforms: Xbox 360 Kinect • Words: Hollander Cooper

Hole in the Wall seems like it would be a perfect fit for Kinect, but with one small change, the Xbox 360 game loses some of the magic of the game show it's based on: While the show involves trying to contort into a shape so that a slow-moving wall will pass by, the game only requires you to fill the shape with your silhouette, which is actually much less challenging.

Unfortunately, that's all there is. Even though there are hundreds of walls and several game modes, every second spent playing is spent doing the exact same thing: trying to fill a hole (or viewing unlocked videos of people from the show getting knocked into the water).

It can still be fun with a few good friends around, but even multiplayer can't add depth to this shallow experience.



MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 2-player local; up to 10-player online
GENRE Party
RELEASE DATE
November 20, 2011
SUITABLE FOR
Die-hard TV show viewers

OVERALL RATING:
2.5

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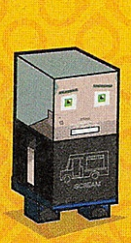

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PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2012

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

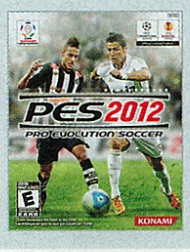
Publisher: Konami • Developer: Konami •
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC • Words: Gord Goble

By any definition, EA Sports's *FIFA Soccer 2012* is a monster. So, why would anyone opt for FIFA's only true rival, *Pro Evolution Soccer 2012*?

For starters, it's cheaper. But the main reason PES successfully soldiers on, year after year, against the FIFA juggernaut: It's perceived by many as being more tactical, more true to the concept of soccer.

All that continues in the latest iteration. It was stupendous mixing it up, especially once default assists were switched off. Suddenly, the game flourished—its intricacy, its nifty new AI and strategy tweaks revealed. It delivers so many player, season, multiplayer, and even managerial options that longevity is all but assured.

Overall, though, there isn't much different from *PES 2011*—and that's not a good thing when you're up against a monster.



MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 4-player head-to-head; online league play
GENRE Sports
RELEASE DATE
September 27, 2011
SUITABLE FOR
Soccer and team-sport buffs

OVERALL RATING: 3.5

▼ *Pro Evolution Soccer 2012*, as with *PES 2011*, still suffers from some color washout.

▼ The on-field action, however, is strong—and the new AI is stellar.

POKÉMON RUMBLE BLAST

EVERYONE 10+ E 10+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: Nintendo • Developer: Ambrella • Platforms: 3DS •
Words: Russ Frushtick

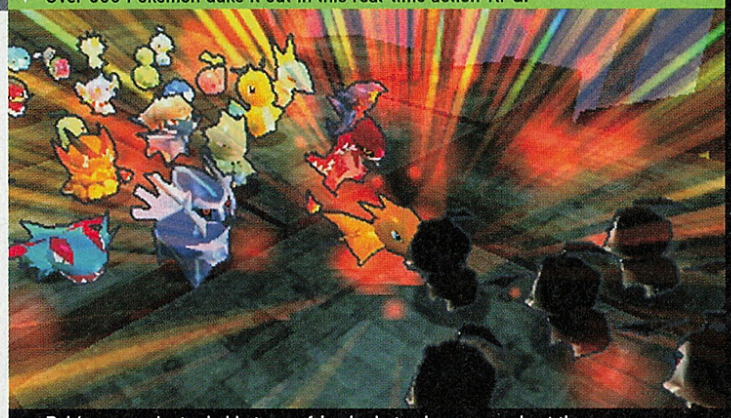
"There is a world of Pokémon different from the one you know." So begins *Pokémon Rumble Blast*, the first of the series made for the 3DS. Funny, I kinda liked the old world. Instead of following the RPG format that defined the *Pokémon* franchise, *Rumble Blast* is more a spin-off, set in a world of Pokémon toys that battle all on their own.

It's best described as "*Pokémon* meets *Diablo*." Levels involve hacking and slashing away at groups of Pokémon in real-time, using such powers as Psybeam and Water Gun. Defeating certain pocket monsters enables you to capture them, with over 600 to be found in the game. Unfortunately, the gameplay is exceedingly mindless and repetitive, with dull environments and uninteresting graphics. Only the most hardcore Pokémon fans should think about this one.

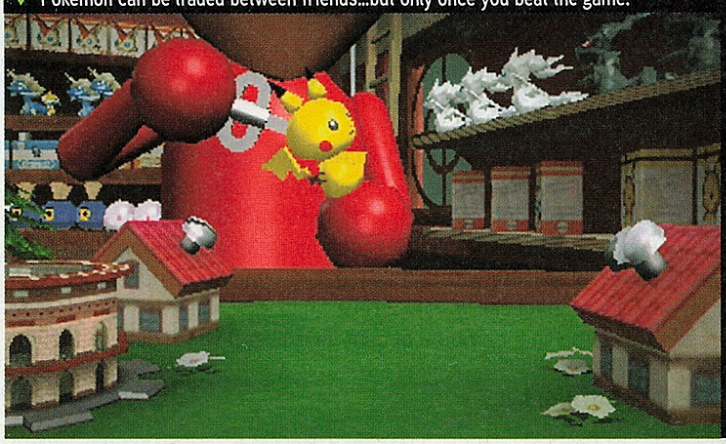
MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-player local
GENRE Action-RPG
RELEASE DATE
October 24, 2011
SUITABLE FOR
Pokémaniacs and youngsters under 10

OVERALL RATING: 2.5

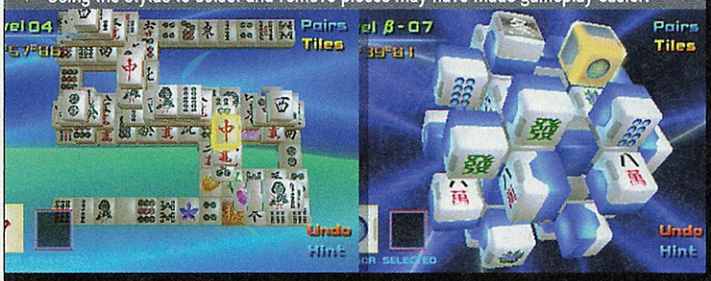
▼ Over 600 Pokémon duke it out in this real-time action-RPG.



▼ Pokémon can be traded between friends...but only once you beat the game.



▼ Using the stylus to select and remove pieces may have made gameplay easier.



▼ The system's 3D capabilities freed the designers to make some cool puzzles.

MAHJONG CUB3D

EVERYONE
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: Atlus • Developer: Sunsoft • Platforms: 3DS • Words: Heidi Kemps

Mahjong tile-matching puzzle games have been around for ages, and they're a tried-and-true game concept enjoyed by millions of players worldwide. *Mahjong Cub3d* attempts to break the mold a bit by taking the puzzles into the third dimension. While adding additional fields of depth to the tile formations does make for very creative and engaging puzzles, the awkward controls can hamper your enjoyment. Since the 3DS's 3D display and touchscreen are separate, the game uses the pad, slider, and buttons to control tile selection and camera, rather than far more intuitive stylus controls. Sometimes simply selecting a tile can be a real hassle, making you wonder if the nifty 3D element is worth the added annoyance. While two-player versus and "classic" game modes are great inclusions, you'll need to consider whether or not you can get past the irritating input scheme before you jump in.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-player via single-cart play
GENRE Puzzle
RELEASE DATE
October 17, 2011
SUITABLE FOR
Players wanting a new dimension in a classic puzzler

OVERALL RATING: 2.75

▼ Play a videogame and be in the kitchen at the same time.

COOKING MAMA 4: KITCHEN MAGIC

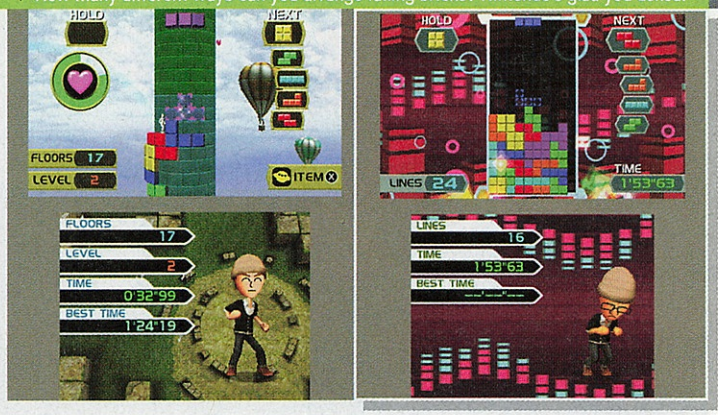
EVERYONE
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: Majesco Entertainment • Developer: Cooking Mama Limited • Platforms: 3DS • Words: Lizzie Cuevas

I made corn dog curry—just one of the wacky recipes in *Cooking Mama 4*. While much of it is similar to previous games—use your stylus to prepare meals in over 200 minigames—this is the first *Mama* that uses the 3DS gyroscope, so such things as cracking eggs over a bowl look one teaspoon cooler. However, where *Mama* really shines is through appetizingly quirky recipes followed by more unlockable minigames where you can help around the house in other ways.

OVERALL RATING: 4.25

▼ How many different ways can you arrange falling bricks? Nintendo's glad you asked.



TETRIS AXIS

EVERYONE
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: Nintendo • Developer: Hudson Soft • Platforms: 3DS • Words: Chuck Osborn

By law, every platform is required to have at least one *Tetris* game, and the 3DS is no exception. *Tetris: Axis* includes over 20 modes—most you've seen before in previous *Tetris* releases and some created just for the 3DS.

Anyone expecting a dazzling 3D experience will be disappointed, as most modes play in 2D (with some 3D backgrounds). The new 3D Fit mode is a winner, dropping blocks with an overhead view; the two AR modes are hard to play. The sheer amount of content makes it worth getting, though.

OVERALL RATING: 3.25

▼ Now, *this* is a vacation!

GO VACATION

EVERYONE 10+ E 10+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: Namco Bandai • Developer: Namco Bandai •
Platforms: Wii • Words: Lizzie Cuevas

If "go vacation" means "do these activities in this order," then Go Vacation nailed it. Instead of choosing from a menu which minigames you want to play, this game has you exploring each resort (there are four: Marine, Snow, City, and Mountain) and traveling to each activity, such as ATV racing or beach volleyball. It's a nice change of pace from other casual games, especially since you can further explore each resort, collect treasure, and have your Mii's photo taken—though playing solo may be a little too slow-paced. Then again, being on vacation is all about relaxing.

OVERALL RATING: 3

▼ There's an option to beat up a Rabbid in your living room! How cool is that?

RAVING RABBIDS: ALIVE & KICKING

EVERYONE 10+ E 10+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: Ubisoft • Developer: Ubisoft •
Platforms: Xbox 360 Kinect • Words: Hollander Cooper

During each *Raving Rabbids: Alive & Kicking* minigame, the camera snaps pictures of you. Viewing the shots, I noticed a trend: Whether we were launching Rabbids from shot-put boogers, flexing to match poses, or shooting carrot juice from our arms, we were always smiling. What the camera didn't catch were the looks of frustration over long load times, or confusion from a poorly explained game. Your best chance for fun and big laughs is to gather some friends for an *Alive & Kicking* party.

OVERALL RATING: 3.25

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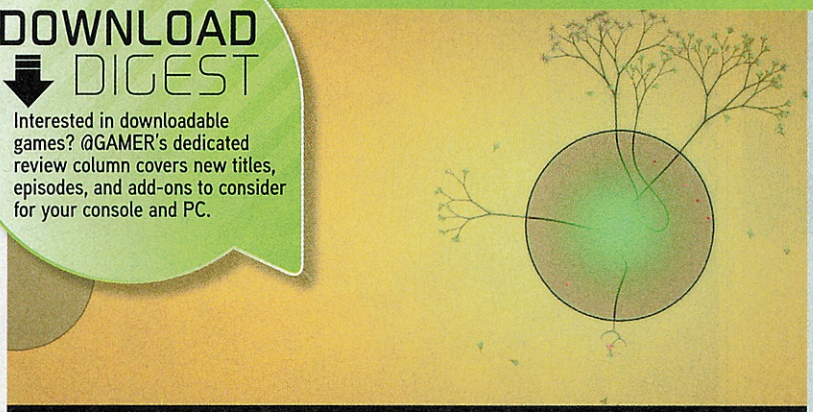
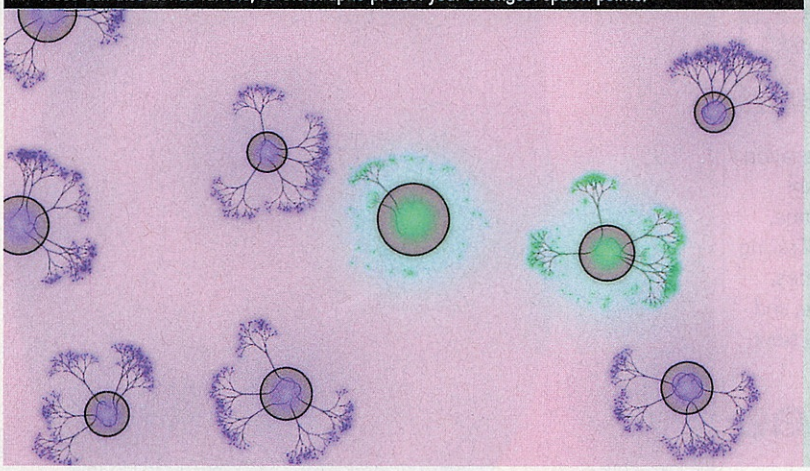
DOWNLOAD DIGEST

Interested in downloadable games? @GAMER's dedicated review column covers new titles, episodes, and add-ons to consider for your console and PC.



▼ Trees can also act as turrets, so stock up to protect your strongest spawn points.



EUFLORIA

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: Omni Systems • Developer: Omni Systems • Price: $10 • Platforms: PSN (October 4, 2011) • Words: Mitch Dyer

Explanation isn't *Eufloria*'s strong suit—nor is it particularly easy to explain. The lengthy and complicated explanations of objectives make it a tough game to figure out, and its abstract, out-there aesthetic, beautiful though it may be, doesn't help. *Eufloria* is slow-paced and seemingly passive, but it's a marvellous bit of expand-and-dominate real-time strategy. Obliterating enemies and taking over their once-occupied asteroids is the sole goal. Sending Seedlings—starships spawned from trees (just roll with it)—to conquer rocks is a simple but increasingly complex task. Each level's new strategy mechanic presents harder challenges, so pointing huge armies at enemy-occupied territory doesn't always work. The strategy of when and where to send speedy or strong Seedlings can be a taxing bit of trial and error. At first, *Eufloria* isn't much more than colorful triangles attacking colorful circles. By the end, I was equal parts exhausted by and obsessed with its rudimentary attack/defend tactics.

OVERALL RATING: 4.25

▼ The hero and orcs are kinda plain, so the charm is in their comical, cartoony violence.

ORCS MUST DIE!

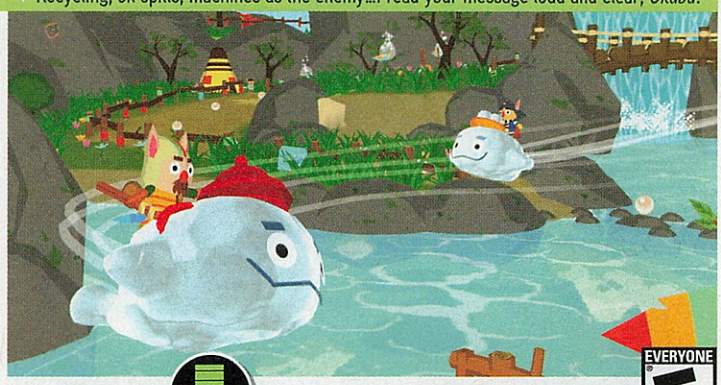
TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: Robot E tainment • Developer: Robot Entertainment • Price: $15 • Platforms: XBLA (October 5, 2011), PC (October 11, 2011) • Words: Mitch Dyer

Placing sentries while actually on the battlefield is the new norm for tower defense games, and *Orcs Must Die* is another killer addition to the blossoming genre. It nails the thrill of trapping, tricking, and otherwise eviscerating greenskins with an aesthetic so close to Disney I go weak in the knees just thinking about it. I enjoyed its been-there formula most in brief doses to maximize its delightful fun, but couldn't play Orcs in marathon sessions without getting tired of watching spike traps sprout.

OVERALL RATING: 3.5

▼ Recycling, oil spills, machines as the enemy...I read your message loud and clear, *Okabu*.



OKABU

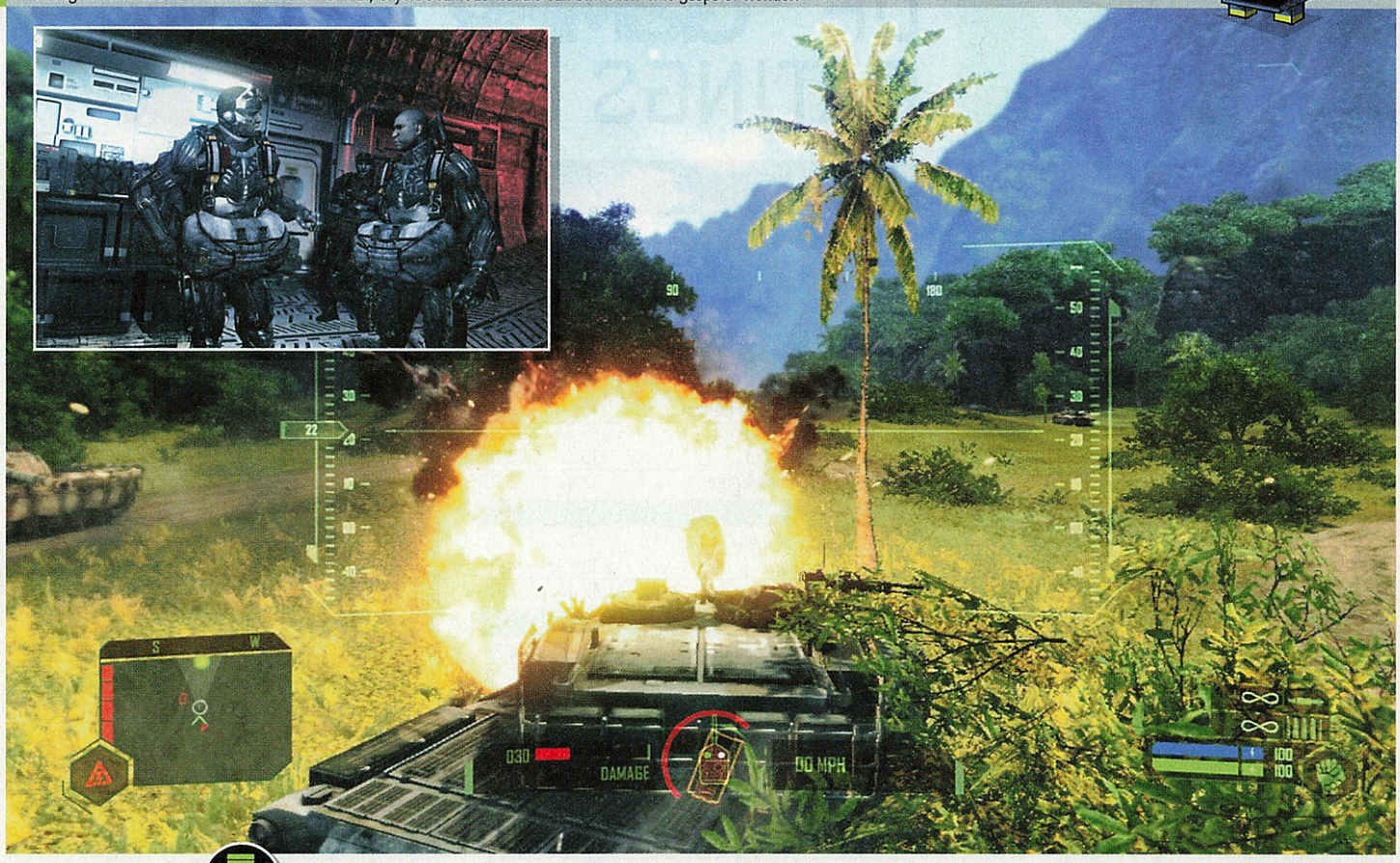
EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: HandCircus • Developer: HandCircus • Price: $15 • Platforms: PSN (October 18, 2011) • Words: Mitch Dyer

If the bright colors, quirky characters, and simple mechanics weren't enough of a hint, let's spell it out: *Okabu* is a game for children. This isn't to say adults can't enjoy it; quite the contrary, the emphasis on co-op encourages parents to play with their kids. *Okabu* is a simple, little action-adventure game that doesn't present any original ideas. Its astute amalgamation of basic game concepts serves as an ace introduction to puzzles, exploration, and combat, though. Without young'uns, *Okabu* is avoidable.

OVERALL RATING: 3.5

Though scaled back and downrezzed somewhat, Crysis's famous visuals can still elicit little gasps of wonder.



CRYSIS

MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: EA • Developer: Crytek • Price: $20 • Platforms: Xbox Live on Demand (October 5, 2011), PSN (October 6, 2011) • Words: Derrek Lucas

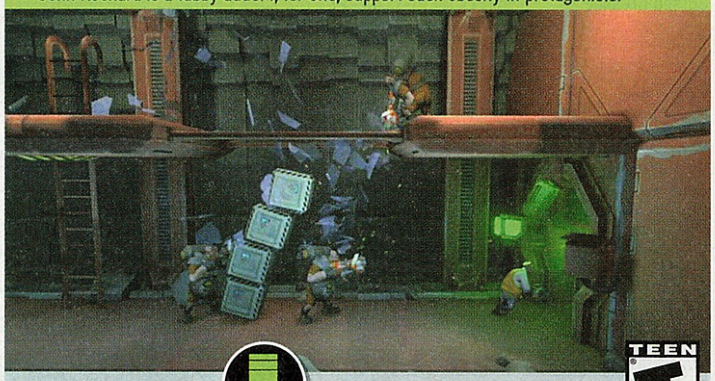
It only took four years, but EA finally realized PC gamers had to share *Crysis* with us common console folk. Right off the bat, Crytek shows just how awesome your prototype "nanosuit" is—by launching you from a freaking plane. When you land relatively unscathed, it becomes obvious that you're capable of some pretty spectacular things. This is confirmed when you punch your first turtle. Shortly thereafter, you realize that punching defenseless animals is one of several features of *Crysis*.

It also happens to boast some of the most enthralling gunplay I've encountered. The number of available weapons may not be that impressive, but the options for customizing them gives the game's limited toolset unexpected variety. Adding a silencer or swapping your iron sights for a sniper scope ensures you'll always have the right tool for the job with some on-the-fly tweaking.

One of *Crysis*'s coolest elements is unquestionably the nanosuit and the nifty things it does. Despite how awesome you might be at pointing guns at things to make them dead, sometimes you'll need some extra help. Whether this means you've got to sneak past your enemies by activating your cloak, or turning on your shield so you can eat a few more bullets, your specialized suit is an indispensable asset. There are many forces at work here, and they all work toward *Crysis* being an astounding first-person shooter.

OVERALL RATING: 4.5

John Rochard is a tubby dude. I, for one, support such obesity in protagonists.



ROCHARD

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: SOE • Developer: Recoil Games • Price: $10 • Platforms: PSN (September 27, 2011) • Words: Mitch Dyer

The latest downloadable rage seems to be 2D puzzle-platformers, but few do much to stand out from the masses. *Rochard* is distinct simply because it employs crates, physics, and a suspiciously similar approximation of the *Half-Life 2* Gravity Gun. Manipulating gravity around you is a brilliant touch that gives the already healthy mix of brain teasers and face-shooting an entertaining and fulfilling new feel. The space-western vibe clashes wonderfully with its blue-collar characters, too, whose hilarious dialogue is half the reason to see the clever puzzles through.

OVERALL RATING: 4.25

A-Z OF @GAMER RATINGS

GAME/PRODUCT	ISSUE #	SCORE OUT OF 5
A		
Ace Combat: Assault Horizon	14	2.75
Air Conflicts: Secret Wars	13	3
Alice: Madness Returns	11	4.5
Assassin's Creed Revelations	15	4.5
B		
Batman: Arkham City	14	5
Battlefield 3	15	4
Beyond Good & Evil HD	09	4.5
Bit.Trip.Complete	14	4.5
Bit.Trip.Saga	14	4.25
Bodycount	13	3.75
Brink	11	2.75
C		
Cabela's Big Game Hunter 2012	13	2.5
Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3	15	4.75
Call of Juarez: The Cartel	12	2.5
Camping Mama: Outdoor Adventures	14	3.0
Captain America: Super Soldier	12	4
Cars 2	11	3.5
Catherine	12	5
Child of Eden	11	2.75
Chime: Super Deluxe	10	4.25
Cooking Mama 4	15	4.25
Country Dance	10	4
Crazy Machines Elements	11	3.5
Cursed Crusade	15	2.75
D		
Dance Central 2	14	4
Dark Souls	14	4.5
Darkspore	10	3.25
Dead Island	14	2.5
Dead or Alive Dimensions	10	4.75
Dead Rising 2: Off the Record	15	3
Deus Ex: Human Revolution	12	4.75
DiRT 3	10	4
Disney Universe	15	3
Dream Trigger 3D	10	2.75
Driver: Renegade	12	3.5
Driver: San Francisco	13	4.25
Duke Nukem Forever	12	2.75
Dungeon Defenders	11	4.5
Dungeon Siege III	11	4
Dungeons & Dragons: Daggerdale	10	3.75
Dynasty Warriors: Gundam 3	11	3.25
E		
Earth Defense Force: Insect Armageddon	12	4
El Shaddai: Ascension of the Metatron	12	4
F		
F1 2011	14	4
Fable III (PC)	11	4.5
F.E.A.R. 3	12	3.75
FIFA 12	13	4.75
Final Fantasy IV	09	3.5
Forza Motorsport 4	14	4.5
From Dust	12	4.25
G		
Gears of War 3	13	4.25
Go Vacation	15	3
God of War: Origins Collection	13	3.75
Green Lantern: Rise of the Maneaters	12	2.75
The Gunstringer	13	3
H		
Harry Potter/Deathly Hallows—Part 2	12	2.5
Hole in the Wall: Deluxe Edition	15	2.5
The House of the Dead: Overkill—Extended Cut	15	3.75
Hunted: The Demon's Forge	12	2.75
I		
Ico and Shadow of the Colossus Collection	13	4.75
InFamous 2	12	4.75
J		
James Noir's Hollywood Crimes	13	4.25
Just Dance 3	14	3
K		
Kirby Mass Attack	14	4
Kung Fu Panda 2	11	2.5
L		
L.A. Noire	10	4.75
The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D	11	4.5
The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword	15	4.5
LEGO Pirates of the Caribbean	10	4.25
LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars	09	3.75
The Lord of the Rings: War in the North	15	3.75
M		
Madden NFL 12	12	4.5
Mahjong Cub3d	15	2.75
Marvel Pinball: Fantastic Four	11	4
Mayhem 3D	10	2.5
Michael Jackson: The Experience (Xbox 360)	09	3.5
Might & Magic: Clash of Heroes HD	10	4.75
Might & Magic Heroes VI	15	3.5
Mortal Kombat	09	4.5
MotorStorm: Apocalypse	10	3.5
MX vs. ATV Alive	10	2.5
N		
NASCAR The Game 2011	09	4
NASCAR Unleashed	15	3.5
NBA 2K12	14	4.75
NCAA Football 12	12	4.5
NHL 12	13	3
Nicktoons MLB	14	2.75
No More Heroes: Heroes' Paradise	12	3.75
O		
Operation Flashpoint: Red River	09	3.5
Otomedius Excellent	12	4.25
Outland	11	4.25
P		
Pac-Man & Galaga Dimensions	11	4.25
Patapon 3	10	3.75
PlayStation Move Heroes	09	3.25
Pokémon Rumble Blast	15	2.5
Portal 2	09	5
PowerUp Heroes	14	4.25
Pro Evolution Soccer 2011 3D	10	3.5
Pro Evolution Soccer 2012	15	3.5
R		
Rage	14	4.5
Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One	15	4
Raving Rabbids: Alive & Kicking	15	3.25
Raving Rabbids: Travel in Time 3D	10	2.75
Rayman Origins	15	4.5
Red Faction: Armageddon	10	2.5
Red Faction: Battlegrounds	10	2.5
Red Orchestra 2	14	3.75
Resident Evil: The Mercenaries 3D	11	4.5
Resistance 3	13	4.5
Rift	09	4.5
Rise of Nightmares	13	3.5
Rush'n Attack: Ex-Patriot	09	3.5
S		
Saints Row: The Third	15	4.25
Samurai Warriors: Chronicles	09	3
Shadows of the Damned	11	4.25
Shift 2 Unleashed	09	4
Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor Overclocked	13	4.75
The Sims 3: Generations	11	4
The Sims 3: Pets	14	4
The Sims Medieval	09	4.5
Sniper: Ghost Warrior (PS3)	11	3.5
SOCOM 4: U.S. Navy SEALs	10	3.5
Sonic Generations	15	3.25
Spider-Man: Edge of Time	15	4
Star Fox 64 3D	13	4.25
Stronghold 3	15	2.5
Supremacy MMA	13	2.5
Swarm	09	4
T		
Tetris Axis	15	3.25
Thor: God of Thunder (DS)	10	2.5
Thor: God of Thunder (Wii)	10	2.5
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 12: The Masters	09	3.75
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Shadow Wars	09	4
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell 3D	10	2.75
Tropico 4	12	4.25
U		
Uncharted 3	15	5
V		
Virtua Tennis 4	10	3.5
W		
Warhammer 40K: Dawn of War II—Retribution	08	4.5
Warhammer 40K: Space Marine	13	4
Warriors: Legends of Troy	09	2.5
White Knight Chronicles II	14	2.5
The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings	11	5
World of Tanks	14	4
WWE All-Stars	09	2.5
Y		
Yakuza 4	08	3.5

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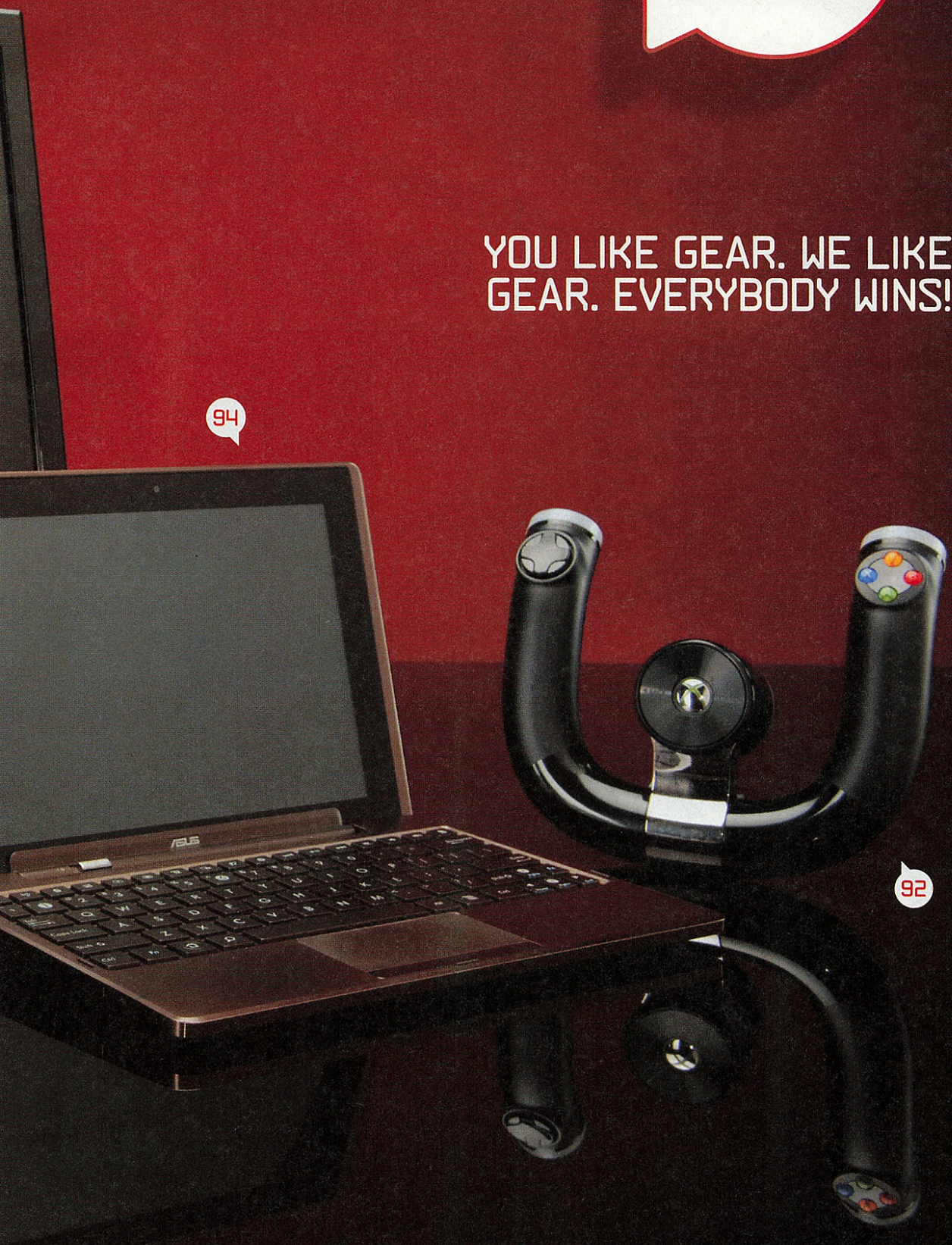


• Photos: Samantha Berg

GEAR

90 LG D2342P 3D LCD Monitor

91 Sound Blaster Tactic3D Omega Wireless Gaming Headset

92 Xbox 360 Wireless Speed Wheel

93 SteelSeries Siberia V2 Headset

94 Asus Eee Pad Transformer Tablet

95 Logitech G400 and SteelSeries Sensei Mice

STEVE SAYS:

This month, we look at one of the most interesting Android tablets to cross our desks, along with a low-cost 3D display and two killer gaming mice. And what would an issue of @GAMER be without a couple of new headset reviews? Plus, Wil brings you his always-entertaining take on this funky wireless wheel-looking thingamajig that Microsoft sent....

LG D2342P 3D DESKTOP MONITOR
Manufacturer: LG
www.LG.com
Price: $299.99

OVERALL SCORE: 2.5

WHERE'S THE POP? Even with 3D boost enabled, the colors look washed out in games.

LG D2342P 3D DESKTOP MONITOR

A 3D monitor for the masses? • Words: Paul Burke

Nvidia's 3D Vision technology works very well, but the associated costs of active-shutter 3D are prohibitive for many gamers—and it doesn't work with consoles. So I applaud LG's efforts to bring a lower-cost option to the market that is both PC- and console-friendly. Unfortunately, price is about the only thing to get excited about here.

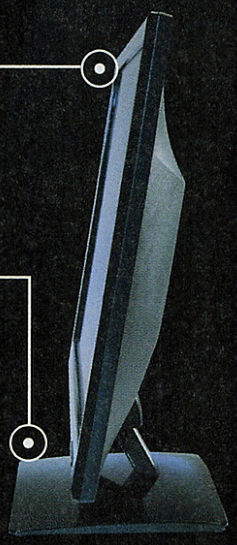
The D2342P uses LG's proprietary passive-3D technology, which means the glasses cost less and, generally, the 3D is not as good—it doesn't have the same color pop as active-shutter and there is a fair amount of ghosting in games. I had better 3D viewing results with movies, and pictures in particular.

3D aside, the display is about as generic as they come with solid, if unremarkable, 2D performance and a fixed display stand that does not allow you to adjust the height of the screen (boo!).

If you must have 3D now and active-shutter options are out of reach (they will run at least $150 more), the D2342P is worth consideration. Otherwise, there are better options out there.

BUILD QUALITY? The D2342P is disturbingly light and feels very fragile overall.

WYSIWYG Yet it still wobbles on the cheap-feeling, fixed stand.



SOUND BLASTER TACTIC3D OMEGA GAMING WIRELESS HEADSET

Creative ups its wireless game

• Words: Steve Klett

SOUND BLASTER TACTIC3D OMEGA GAMING WIRELESS HEADSET

Manufacturer: Creative Labs
www.creative.com
Price: $199.99

OVERALL SCORE: 4

Creative Labs has long been known in PC gaming circles for its Sound Blaster audio cards, and now it's trying to make some noise in all circles with its new Omega wireless gaming headset.

Compatible with PC/Mac, Xbox 360, and PS3, the headset uses 2.4GHz technology and twin 50mm drivers to deliver rich, clear, uninterrupted gaming audio performance. I'm pretty much blown away with how awesome these stereo cans sound across all platforms, and they are very simple to set up. And my friends and foes reported that my smack-talking came through loud and clear over the noise-cancelling detachable mic.

The large, padded faux-leather earcups are comfortable, but get a bit hot after extended periods of use in anything resembling a warm environment. And they were also a bit tight on my round, Charlie Brown-esque head.

The Omegas are not cheap, and feel very solidly built. I've no doubt they'll last a good long time in just about any gamer's den.

VISE-LIKE
The Omegas fit a bit too snugly for my tastes—but they won't fly off in the heat of battle.

CAN-CANS
The earcups also house all the controls. They work well, but I prefer a volume wheel over +/- buttons.

▲ **TRANSMITTER**
This little guy handles all the 2.4GHz wireless communication duties, and also recharges the headset.

XBOX 360 WIRELESS SPEED WHEEL

A solid entry-level wheel for the casual racer • Words: William O'Neal

I love a good racing wheel as much as the next racing fan. In addition to Thrustmaster's $600 T500 Racing Simulator for the PS3, I also use Mad Catz's $100 MC2 Racing Wheel and Pedals for the Xbox 360. The thing is, I don't always want to set up a full-on simulation type of experience. And those rigs can take up a lot of space (thank God for the man cave).

Conversely, playing a racing game on a standard gamepad isn't the most fun experience. While *Forza 4* has Kinect support (where you are the controller), not everyone feels comfortable playing the game that way. That's where the Xbox 360 Wireless Speed Wheel comes in. Essentially a handheld motion-controlled device, it's an interesting—and surprisingly effective—hybrid of a racing wheel and the kind of motion-controlled experience Microsoft is so crazy about these days.

Setup is easy enough: Just turn on the device and sync it with your Xbox 360. I tested the wheel with two games: *DIRT 3* and *F1 2011*, both by Codemasters. Sitting on the couch, both games recognized the controller, and steering was as simple as turning it left or right. While the wheel boasts almost all of the standard Xbox 360 controller buttons, it doesn't have shoulder buttons. I sometimes use a gamepad's shoulder buttons like paddle shifters, and I would have liked that option.

The controller is plenty accurate, but it definitely feels more suited to casual games than hardcore racers. Either way, for around $60, it's great for racing fans who want something more than a gamepad, but lack the cheddar or space for a more sim-like setup.

▲ U-TURN
It's not so much a "wheel," so don't expect 360 degrees of rotation. I had no problems in *DIRT 3* or *F1 2011*.

CONTROL
Connecting the wheel to your Xbox 360 is easy. Once connected, I found navigating around the menus to be simple.

MISSING SOMETHING?
While the wheel sports the standard buttons, it doesn't have shoulder bumpers. Racing fans who use those buttons for shifting will miss them.

SOLID
The wheel feels nice in the hands. The fact that it's "floating" in midair, though, takes some getting used to.

XBOX 360 WIRELESS SPEED WHEEL

Manufacturer: Microsoft
www.microsoft.com
Price: $59.99

OVERALL SCORE: 3.5

STEELSERIES
SIBERIA V2 HEADSET

Manufacturer: SteelSeries
www.steelseries.com
Price: $89.99

OVERALL SCORE: 4.5

STRAP RAP
By far the V2's weakest point, this flimsy strap barely holds the earcups in place with some extremely weak elastic.

SOUND DESIGN
Comfortable foam-lined earcups help dampen outside noise, while accurately transmitting even the faintest of in-game cues.

TALK IT UP
The retractable microphone lets the V2 act as good general-purpose headphones without any annoying dangly bits getting in the way.

STEELSERIES SIBERIA V2 HEADSET

Great audio at a good price. Now about that headstrap... • Words: Kyle Orland

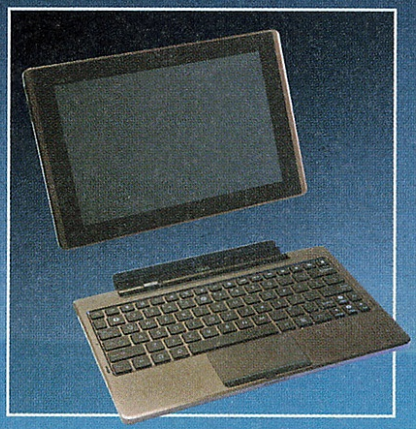
The Siberia V2 maintains SteelSeries's reputation for high-quality audio, with powerful, padded earcups that block out noise and capture even the slightest of in-game sounds with an impressive directionality. As always, the SteelSeries-standard retractable microphone is a welcome, stylish touch, as is the optional LiveMix feature that automatically reduces in-game audio when other players are talking. And the price isn't even that unreasonable, given the unit's power.

If there's one gripe I have with the V2, it's with the unit's overall comfort. Rather than using a fully adjustable system of moveable earcups, the V2 is held on to your head with an extremely flimsy padded strap, which in turn is kept on the headset with weak elastic. The setup helps keep the unit relatively light, but it also requires constant adjustment to get the cups to rest in the correct position. Console gamers may also want to consider a wireless option, as the V2's four-meter extender cord/console adapter is a major tripping hazard in the living room.

ASUS EEE PAD TRANSFORMER

Manufacturer: Asus
www.usa.asus.com
Price: $399.99

OVERALL SCORE: 4.5



▲ DOCK IT!
The tablet slides easily into the keyboard dock, however you have to apply significant pressure to get it to lock in place. Its onboard battery adds seven hours to the tablet's cordless life.

EYE CANDY
Movies, games, and yes, even spreadsheets (yuck!) looked great on the 10.1-inch 720p screen.

LAPTOP-ESQUE
The touchpad takes some time to get adept at using, but once you master it the Transformer really shines.

QWERTY-ME
The essential Android navigation buttons (Home, Back, etc) are integrated into the QWERTY keyboard.

ASUS EEE PAD TRANSFORMER

Look—it's a laptop, it's a netbook, it's a supertablet! • Words: Steve Klett

Like one of the massive robots in Michael Bay's films this 10.1-inch, Android 3.0-based tablet can "transform" almost instantly into a fairly capable netbook/ultra-portable laptop replacement with the aid of a $100 keyboard dock accessory. Said dock is really a must-have with this tablet as it adds a couple USB ports and an SD slot to the equation—and it makes typing emails and even composing documents a relative breeze (Polaris Office is included). Plus, the keyboard includes a touchpad that really makes the Transformer *feel* like a laptop, or at the very least, a high-end netbook (take that, iOS!).

Nvidia's dual-core Tegra processor comprises the Transformer's guts, which translates into silky smooth game performance and access to a stable of Tegra-optimized games with even more eye candy than the generic counterparts you'll find in the Marketplace.

Out of the dock the Transformer is not the thinnest or lightest tablet around, and the keyboard makes it quite heavy. Still, considering it can serve double duty it's well worth the form factor trade-off.

CHANGE GEARS
Adjust resolution on the fly to gain precision or speed, depending on your in-game situation.

LOGITECH G400 MOUSE

Manufacturer: Logitech
www.logitech.com
Price: $49.99

OVERALL SCORE: 4.0

LOGITECH G400 MOUSE

Beauty's only skin deep • Words: Steve Klett

It's easy to overlook the G400. At first glance, it's not shiny (you're looking at the Sensei below right now, aren't you?), and there are few buttons and no slick LEDs to "ooh and ahh" over. And that would be a mistake.

For the price you'd be hard-pressed to find a more capable, rock-solid gaming mouse—a declaration warranted by my headshot rampages in *Battlefield 3*. The 3600 dpi optical engine doubles the resolution of its popular predecessor, and you can switch to four sensitivity settings on the fly with a simple button press or two. And the form factor is amazingly comfortable to use.

The new Logitech Gaming Software makes it about as easy as it can be to customize the G400's settings and program the eight onboard buttons to your liking, too. I would like to see a pair of buttons on the right side, but for $50 I'm not going to complain—much.

STEELSERIES SENSEI MOUSE

Manufacturer: SteelSeries
www.steelseries.com
Price: $89.99

OVERALL SCORE: 5

STEELSERIES SENSEI MOUSE

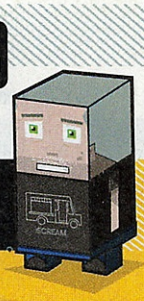
Total precision! • Words: Steve Klett

I like shiny things as much as the next gamer, and if nothing else the Sensei is about as shiny as an old-school Cylon Centurion. Of course, all that shininess is of little help in the middle of a fragfest, and thankfully the Sensei has many helpful tricks up its sleeves.

At its heart lies one of the most impressively precise and flat-out smooth-feeling optical engines I've encountered. This is made possible by an onboard ARM CPU that is as powerful as a classic Pentium chip. (Now, think about *that* for a bit.)

And, the mouse is endlessly configurable—you can change just about everything from the lift distance sensitivity to the colors of the onboard LEDs. Hardcore, pro, and pro-wannabe gamers will go nuts over setting up custom profiles for their favorite games with unique FreeMove, acceleration, and polling rate settings—and even custom graphics.

HOLY DPI BATMAN
The 32-bit onboard ARM processor gives the Sensei a maximum resolution of 5700 dpi / 11,400 dcpi.



If you have some videogame "facts" you want to verify as real or urban legend, ask Andy: Send your questions to andy@atgamermagazine.com.

Stripping Gears

With the recent release of the third entry in Epic Games's *Gears of War* series, it seemed to be a good time to address a few questions about potential "Easter eggs" that have been rumored in the previous releases. There's a lot of real estate you need to traverse as you blast your way through the entire trilogy, which means there's a lot of places where the designers can have some fun with players. Let's check a few out...

TRUTH OR LIES:

I've played the heck out of the whole Gears of War series, but my friend says there is a secret spot in GoW1 where you can discover a guy sitting on a toilet. I've gone into a bathroom where a dead guy was on a toilet in a stall, but my friend says this one is in a room you can't physically get to. I'm pretty sure he's lying.

TRUTH

In the original GoW, there is indeed a hidden guy sitting on the pot, though you'll have to work a bit to find him. In an online or offline multiplayer match on the Rooftops map, head to the darker part of the map (or if you die, you'll eventually respawn near there). Looking at the building across the way—if you have a fence between you and the building, you're in the wrong place—you'll see three windows with the center one still having unbroken panes. If you toss a smoke grenade in there, you'll see the silhouette of a guy sitting on the porcelain throne through the smoke. It's even better if you use a Hammer of Dawn (located in a nearby room on the roof) to light up the room. Um, I think he's dead, Jim...

A guy in our party during some Gears of War 2 multiplayer battles the other day told us that there's an Easter egg in the game where Marcus cooks breakfast for his whole squad. I haven't found it yet and don't know anyone else who has...so I don't think he's telling the truth. What do you say?

LIES

Well, mostly. In Chapter 5 of Act IV ("The Hive"), after the split paths rejoin, you can find a surprise by shooting the decorative pillar in the room that looks out over the stairway circling the building. Blast or otherwise break the pillar, which reveals what must be a Locust toaster (say that three times fast!), then hold X to have Marcus push down the lever to start making toast. It'll start smoking, Marcus will cough, and then it'll spring up. At that point, Marcus recites the classic line, "Who wants some toast?!" followed by some other chatter between the squadmates on how they each like their toast done up. While Marcus makes toast, that's hardly enough to provide the daily minimum

requirement of vitamins and minerals a growing COG soldier needs to stay healthy, so we can't call it "breakfast."

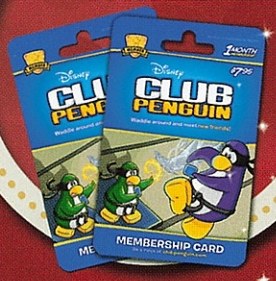
BONUS TRUTH

I asked Cliff "CliffyB" Bleszinski, design director at Epic Games, if there were any secrets in the recently released *Gears of War 3* he could dish for *Truth or Lies*. "Can't give away too much," says Cliff, "but I can give you one...I can tell you that there's a hidden photo of my dog, Teddy, in the game." I'm sworn to secrecy on the details and don't want to spoil it for you anyway, but Cliff said that you'll be able to see a framed shot of his dog (the same shot you see here) in the scene after Marcus has a special reunion.

Disney

Joyful Holiday

Great Stocking Stuffers



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FROM: Dad

To: Scott
FROM: Grandpa

To: Kyle
FROM: Santa

To: Kayse
FROM: Mom

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